

✓ Bi-County is forced to a deciding game against Ottawa American.
✓ Area players are gearing up for the all-star football game in Peoria. **Page B1**



Weather:
Page A8



Family gets fleeced

A Sublette couple processes alpaca fleece into yarn. **Page D1**



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Radiation resurgence



NewsTribune photo/fen p Smith

Reactor operator in training Dave Volden bends over a desk to examine reactor systems as reactor operators Randy Pritz (from left) and Al Zolme discuss plant operations in the main control room. Each individual fuel rod can be monitored for anomalies and the operators can control many of the plants' system from the room. Each system is color coded so operators can more easily follow the status of the plant.

Nuclear energy safe, clean

By Brock Cooper
NewsTribune Reporter

Razor wire and armed guards are common sights at the nuclear power plant in Morris, but despite the impenetrable fortress exterior, its real power resides underneath tons of steel and concrete.
"We are the largest nuclear operator in the nation," Exelon communications manager for the Dresden site Robert Osogood said.
Dresden nuclear power plant, owned by Exelon, produces almost 2,000 megawatts of electricity using two nuclear reactors. Radioactive fuel rods are placed in water and bombarded with small neutral particles called neutrons.
As the neutrons collide with the nuclear fuel, often uranium-235, it breaks apart other neutrons in a process called fission. Those neutrons in turn collide with other atoms of the fuel, freeing more neutrons and creating a chain reaction.
When the neutrons collide with the atom, in effect splitting it, it creates a large amount of energy in the form of heat. The nuclear rods are submerged in water and as the heat builds from the fission, it converts the water into steam that turns the turbine for the generator.

See 'Safe' Page A4

Is nuclear energy worth risk?

By Brock Cooper
NewsTribune Reporter

Nuclear power can outperform fossil fuel plants, but is cheaper and abundant energy worth risking the possible health and environment of future generations?
President Bush has called for the creation of new nuclear power plants as a solution to environmental dangers posed by coal burning power plants, but is nuclear power more trouble than its worth?
"Switching from dirty coal plants to dangerous nuclear power is like giving up smoking cigarettes and taking up crack," Sierra Club's director of global warming Dan Becker said.
While nuclear power can create large amounts of electricity and not release pollution into the atmosphere, if anything does go wrong, the consequences can be devastating. The worst nuclear accident in history happened in 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in Ukraine.
According to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a major power surge destroyed the unit 1 reactor and released massive amounts of radioactive material into the environment. The reactor was encased in sand and entombed in a concrete "sarcophagus" to limit the further release of radioactive material.

See 'Risk' Page A4



A periodic exploration of the issues

Decision on troops not likely until November

By Anne Flaherty
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For months September has been cast as a pivotal time for determining the course of the war in Iraq yet a top general now says a solid judgment on the U.S. troop buildup there may not come until November.
Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno told reporters after a Senate hearing Thursday he would need beyond September to tell if improvements in Iraq represent long-term trends.
"In order to do a good assessment I need at least until November," said Odierno, a deputy to Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. military commander in Iraq.
Petraeus and other officials testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and briefed reporters on Thursday. Making strides toward security and political goals could take more time than first thought, they warned.
A stark assessment came via video link from the Iraqi capital when Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador, told the committee that Iraq is gripped by fear and struggling to meet security and political goals by September.
"If there is one word, I would use to sum up the atmosphere in Iraq — on the streets, in the countryside, in the neighborhoods and at the national level — that word would be 'fear,'" Crocker said. "For Iraq to move forward at any level, that fear is going to have to be replaced with some level of trust and confidence and that is what the effort at the national level is about."
Most lawmakers have hoped that Iraq would show more signs of stability this summer, long before the 2008 U.S. elections. Republicans in particular have thought that, if substantial gains could not be found by September, then President Bush would have to rethink his military strategy, which relies on 158,000 U.S. troops.
"I'm not optimistic," Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said of the September assessment.
The Bush administration has tried to minimize the importance of the progress report due in September, trying to make clear it is not the final judgment. Beyond that, the administration is saying U.S. forces will play a role in Iraq through the end of Bush's presidency, in January 2009.
Some 30 House members and 40 senators took buses to the Pentagon for separate question-and-answer sessions with Crocker and Petraeus. Lawmakers said they were told that the political process was moving slowly and that it would be very difficult for Iraq to meet its 18 reform goals in the next 45 days.
In his Senate testimony, Crocker played down the importance of meeting major changes right away and said less ambitious goals, such as restoring electricity to a neighborhood, can be just as beneficial. He also pointed toward political headway at the local level.

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Rowling bids her boy wizard goodbye with 'Deathly Hallows'

By Jill Lawless
Associated Press Writer

EDINBURGH, Scotland (AP) — Harry Potter's life hangs in the balance. Millions of fans are holding their breath. Meanwhile, his creator is baking a cake — and keeping her secret.
On Saturday, readers around the globe will learn the schoolboy wizard's fate, with the publication of "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows," the seventh and final book in J.K. Rowling's fantasy series. Will Harry defeat his evil nemesis, Lord Voldemort, and return order to the wizarding world? Will he die in the stamp of many fans fear — and as Rowling, an expert narrative tease, has hinted?
"Harry's story comes to a definite end in book seven," is all she will say a few days before publication, serving up tea and home-baked sponge cake in her comfortable Edinburgh house. Writing the final words of the saga felt "like a bereavement."
That sounds ominously final. So have we really seen the last of the staff and students of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry? "Because the world is so big, there would be room to do other stuff" Rowling says carefully. "I am not planning to do that, but I'm not going to say I'm never going to do it."
Rowling (her name rhymes with bowling, rather than howling), looking relaxed in jeans and a sweater, shoulder-length blonde hair stylishly cut, has wildly mixed emotions at leaving behind the character she conjured up during a train journey across England in 1990: a neglected, bespectacled orphan who learns on his 11th birthday that he is a wizard.
She's enjoying the absence of pressure from publishers and fans clamoring for the next installment in Harry's adventures. And she's reveling in the chance to focus on normal life with her husband and three children.
But after finishing the last book, "I felt terrible for a week."
"The first two days in particular, it was like a bereavement even though I was pleased with the book. And then after a week that cloud lifted and I felt quite light-hearted, quite liberated," she says.
"Finishing is emotional because the books have been so wrapped up with my life."
See 'Rowling' Page A2

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See 'Rowling' Page A2



AP photo

Book store employee and Harry Potter fanato Kimberly Price, 21, hugs a shipment of boxes containing the final Harry Potter book in the store at the Crossing Mall on Thursday in Torranceville, Pa.

Weekend today



✓ "The Sound of Music" takes the stage in Princeton. **Cover**

At the pump

Each Friday, the NewsTribune tracks the average price of regular self-serve gasoline at six area stations.

This morning: **\$3.11**
Last Friday: **\$3.26**

Current wholesale: \$2.19



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Lottery Obituaries

A2

B6

Opinion Sports

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B1

Safe

Continued from Page One and creates electricity.

"It's cheaper to run a nuclear plant, but it is more expensive to build because of the technology," Osgood said.

La Salle County Nuclear Generating Station communications manager Anne Thomas said there could be a stigma attached to nuclear energy because of highly publicized accidents at Chernobyl in Russia and Three Mile Island in New Jersey.

Chernobyl released 100 times more radiation into the atmosphere than the nuclear bombs used during World War II. In smaller communities, like La Salle, the fear of nuclear energy is lessened because most people in the area work at the plant or have a friend or relative at the plant.

"The potential of the 'they don't know what is going on there' feeling is completely eradicated," Thomas said.

With the films of the 1930s and '60s of radioactive mutants running amok in the distant past, nuclear power plants have gained some mainstream support, but that isn't always the case.

A plant in New Jersey that sits in the shadow of Three Mile Island was going through million-dollar meetings with public meetings," Osgood said they met staunch opposition including a high publicity trade led by Alec Baldwin.

Osgood said the reality is that ever since Three Mile Island, there are many protections and redundancies built into the system so it would be very difficult for a major nuclear accident to happen again.

"A whole new series of regulations came from that," Osgood said.

The rods themselves act as a barrier to radiation as well as the water the material sits in, according to Dresden oper-

ator Tom Pouk.

"Water is a natural shield," Pouk said.

The reactor is then covered in tons of concrete and metal to further shield the workers from stray radiation.

Each of the rods in each reactor is watched individually to check for any abnormalities. There are two separate auxiliary power systems that can operate the plant in the event of a power outage and everything can be controlled and shutdown from a central control room.

"It's just another line of defense," Pouk said.

For there to be a steady stream of electricity, the material has to be kept in a critical state where the nuclear reactions are fast enough to create enough steam to turn the turbine, but not too fast that they become an out-of-control chain reaction.

A uranium pellet about the size of a pencil eraser which

fills each rod can create as much electricity as three barrels of oil, one ton of coal and 17,000 cubic feet of natural gas.

The fuel being used by nuclear power plants release no pollutants into the atmosphere, Pouk said. There are about 104 operating nuclear power plants in the United States providing about 20 percent of the national electricity.

Construction has not been started on a new U.S. nuclear power since 1976, but other countries are embracing the technology to provide electricity and decrease dependence on oil and fossil fuels.

"For many countries, nuclear power is a way to enhance the security and diversity of their energy supplies. This also was true in the 1970s, when concerns about energy security, triggered by disruptions in oil supply, were a major cause of nuclear expansion in countries such as

Japan and France," International Atomic Energy Agency director general Mohamed ElBaradei said. "Today, France depends on nuclear power for 78 percent of its electricity supply. In Japan, the figure is 30 percent."

Unlike coal and natural gas, fuel is only 10-15 percent of the total running cost in nuclear power plants. Thus price fluctuations in the market are of a minor concern.

President George W. Bush wants to create more nuclear power plants in the United States to offset the pollution created by fossil fuel plants.

With increased security and several redundancies to prevent a nuclear accident, nuclear power is a safe, clean and abundant, but its ultimate demise might be at the hands of public opinion.

"The public's perception of risk has a strong influence on a country's energy choices. As

with civil aviation, bioengineering, or any other advanced technology, nuclear power does not come with absolute safety guarantees," ElBaradei said. "What is important is that the risks and benefits are clearly understood."

Other parts

- in the series:
- Batteries, March 21
- Biodiesel, March 22
- Com (ethanol), March 26
- Coal, April 9
- Com (ethics), April 16
- BIS, May 18
- Gasoline, May 23
- Geothermal, May 29
- Heating oil, May 31
- Hydrogen, June 13
- Methane, July 3
- Natural gas, July 16

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Risk

Continued from Page One

There were 600 workers at the site during the accident. Two died within hours of the reactor explosion and 134 received high radiation doses and suffered from acute radiation poisoning.

From that 134, 28 died within four months of the accident. Radiation also contaminated nearby villages, and 4,000 children have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer from drinking milk with radioactive iodine. The area around the reactor site for 30 miles is off limits to all but authorized personnel.

In the United States, there are several redundant safety systems to ensure the safety of the reactors and the employees and the nuclear industry are open to sharing information with other plants so they can know of any possible problems.

"When it comes to anything that can impact plant operation or nuclear safety we share that across the board," Dresden power plant site communications manager Robert Osgood said.

Also, the control room in the nuclear power plant monitors almost every system within the plant including each individual fuel-filled rod. In the event of an emergency the control room has almost total control of all systems.

"We can perform all the actions necessary for reactor shutdown," Dresden operator Tom Pouk said.

According to a Greenpeace report, there have been more than 200 near misses to a meltdown in the 103 U.S. nuclear plants. Dresden reactors 2 and 3 are in the top 10 reactors for most near misses, with 10 combined.

"These 'near misses' make it disturbingly clear that nuclear reactors are as dangerous today as they were 20 years ago when Chernobyl reawakened millions to the realities of nuclear power," the report cited.

Along with the threat of possible nuclear accidents, nuclear plants have a higher risk of being attacked or used by terrorists not only because of potential radioactivity, but also because nuclear fuel or waste can be used to make nuclear weapons.

A nuclear bomb explosion is created in a similar way to nuclear energy. A much more unstable form of radioactive material is bombarded with neutrons, but because the fuel is so unstable, there are many more reactions and much faster.

"We have better, cleaner and cheaper energy solutions that can be used to meet our energy needs and protect the environment," Sierra Club's David Hamilton said.

While nuclear reactors do not emit harmful pollutants into the atmosphere like coal or natural gas plants do, the Sierra Club estimates every nuclear reactor generates about 20 tons of spent

nuclear fuel and other low level nuclear waste every year.

Osgood said the Dresden power plant in Morris, owned by Exelon, kept its waste underwater to keep the spent fuel "cool," but recently began storing the waste on site in large concrete casks to eventually be transported to the proposed Yucca Mountain repository.

The suggested repository is located on federal land in Nevada and, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, would store high-level radioactive waste from more than 232 temporary storage sites in 39 states. The repository is scheduled to be open in 2010 and the government would make about 4,300 shipments.

Bush has been adamant about the 2010 opening date despite reservations by the U.S. Appeals Court that the design failed to meet safety standards by National Academy of Science.

The casks used by Dresden and other nuclear plants are made up of a stainless steel skin with neutron shielding. There is an inner lid assembly, outer lid assembly and impact liner made of an inner layer of redwood, balsa wood and stainless steel inner shell and outer skin.

The casks must be able to withstand a 30-foot free drop, a 40-inch drop onto a 5-inch in diameter steel shaft, immersion in water and being fully engulfed in fire up to 1,475 degree Fahrenheit for 30 minutes.



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