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Braidwood Nuclear Plant Shuts Down, Vents Steam

Reactors at the nuclear power plant in southwest suburban Braidwood shut down early this morning. Large plumes of steam could be seen escaping from the plant, but its owner says there's no safety concern.

That's the sound neighbors have been hearing since about two in the morning. That's when the second of two reactors shut off, due to a problem with its cooling system. Tom Zimmer lives next door to the plant. He says it sounds like a tornado or jet engine.

ZIMMER: It's been up and down, real, real loud. I mean last night at 2:18 it woke me up. I thought the place was gonna blow. Matter of fact, the wife said she thought it was over with for us out here, you know.

Prema Chandrathil is a spokeswoman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. She says the plant is designed to vent steam when the cooling system has a problem. She says the steam likely contains low levels of tritium, a radioactive isotope, but not enough to pose a risk to health or safety. Tom Zimmer says he and his wife aren't so certain, and they plan to hunker down with the windows closed for a while.