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San Onofre reports fish kill

By: PAUL SISSON - Staff Writer

SAN ONOFRE ---- More than 5 tons of anchovies met an untimely end at the San Onofre nuclear power plant last weekend.

Plant owner Southern California Edison reported an "unusual" fish kill to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Monday, according to a bulletin listed on the regulatory agency's Web site.

According to the bulletin, each of San Onofre's two cooling pipes sucked thousands of anchovies into the plant's cooling system Friday and Saturday. By the time the fish volume tapered off Sunday, approximately 11,070 pounds --- or 5.5 tons --- of anchovies had been killed.

Plant spokesman Ray Golden said Monday that schools of anchovies formed too close to the plant's intake structures, which are in about 50 feet of water 3,200 feet off shore.

"We believe it was a result of schooling that we see from time to time," Golden said.

Because it uses so much salt water for cooling, San Onofre regularly kills some fish every day. However, if the plant kills more than 4,500 pounds in one 24-hour period, it must report the incident to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"It averages 200 pounds per day," Golden said.

The last time San Onofre reported a large fish kill was in February 2004 when an estimated 7 tons of sardines were sucked into the plant's cooling pipes, which are 18 feet in diameter. Together, the twin intakes pull 2.5 billion gallons of water from the Pacific every day. The water is used to cool steam produced by the plant's nuclear reactors before it is returned to the ocean.