Gulf States Utilities hosted a tour Wednesday morning of their River Bend nuclear power plant site.

Jim Simon (General Area Development representative for G.S.U.) and Bill Benedetto (G.S.U.'s director of Communications) guided the tour around the site, pointed out features unique to atomic power plant construction, and fielded questions from reporters.

Many of the questions dealt with safety. The safety of nuclear waste, and of the plant itself, Benedetto explained that as far as waste was concerned, the spent fuel would be placed in an on-site storage facility capable holding nineteen years worth of nuclear waste.

As far as transportation and storage away from the site was concerned, he pointed out that the federal government has accepted responsibility for all storage and shipping of waste, and elaborated on the standards of ruggedness to which the spent-fuel shipping containers were built.

The accident at the Three-Mile Island nuclear plant was discussed. "Basically, the accident occurred at Three Mile Island because the technicians in-
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interfered with the automatic operation of the reactor,” Benedetto said. “They were getting faulty readings that indicated the water level in the reactor was at the correct level and increasing when they closed the valve. Actually, the level was low and the reactor was automatically bringing the level up when they interrupted the process,” he said.

Asked if there was the possibility of another major accident occurring, he replied, “I don’t think that we’ll have an accident of that magnitude, because of Three Mile Island.” He went on to say that since the accident, training programs for plant personnel and the use of simulators had increased dramatically.

At present, the power plant site is about thirty per cent complete. Progress has been slow since construction started in 1976, with a year and a half delay at the start. The date for completion of the plant was placed sometime in 1984.

When finished, the plant will produce 940 megawatts of electricity and will have cost 2.3 billion dollars, which represents a large investment in time, effort, and money. Acceptance by the public has become increasingly important to G.S.U. In addition to this tour, and others planned in the future, there are plans underway to construct a public information center at the plant.