

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC ESTABLISHES REQUIREMENTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS
OF APPLICATIONS TO RENEW NUCLEAR POWER PLANT OPERATING LICENSES;
PUBLIC COMMENTS SOUGHT ON NEW RULE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is moving to streamline requirements governing environmental reviews of applications to renew operating licenses for nuclear power plants.

It is amending its regulations to define two categories of environmental impacts: (1) those for which a generic analysis based on experience gained from operating nuclear power plants has been performed and will be adopted in plant-specific reviews; and (2) those environmental impacts for which a plant-specific analysis will have to be performed.

These environmental issues are included in a table which addresses the relative magnitude of the impact of each issue and categorizes it according to whether or not additional site-specific review is needed at the time an application for license renewal is being reviewed. The scope of the additional site-specific analysis also is spelled out.

The NRC is soliciting public comment on this interim final rule during a 30-day period which ends July 5. Commenters are specifically asked to address the treatment in environmental reviews of the impact of low-level waste storage and disposal; the cumulative radiological effects from the uranium fuel cycle; and the effects from the disposal of high-level waste and spent fuel.

The final rule, consisting of amendments to Part 51 of the Commission's regulations, will be effective August 5 unless the NRC determines that changes should be made as the result of public comments received.

In addition to defining the two environmental impact categories, the amendments:

-- eliminate NRC judgments regarding the need for electric generating capacity, which is the responsibility of other regulatory bodies;

-- require a plant-specific comparison of the environmental impacts of alternative energy sources to those of license renewal;

-- eliminate consideration of utility economics and the traditional cost-benefit analysis from license renewal reviews; and

-- use a site-specific decision standard under which a license renewal application would be rejected if the environmental impacts of license renewal are sufficiently great that preserving that option for energy planning decisionmakers would be unreasonable.

In the procedure under the amendments, the results of the environmental review will be detailed in a supplemental site specific environmental impact statement. Members of the public will be given the opportunity to participate in a public meeting to discuss what issues should be addressed in that document. A draft of the new impact statement will be made available for public comment, and any comments received will be taken into account in preparing the final version which will contain the staff's conclusions regarding the acceptability of the environmental impacts associated with license renewal.

The amendments also include a provision that they and the supporting "Generic Environmental Impact Statement for License Renewal of Nuclear Power Plants" (NUREG-1437) will be reviewed on a schedule that will permit revisions to be made, if needed, every 10 years. Copies of NUREG-1437 can be purchased from the Government Printing Office, P. O. Box 37082, Washington, D. C. 20402-9328; telephone: 202/512-1800.

Persons wishing to comment on the amendments should send comments to: The Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, Attention: Docketing and Services Branch. Comments may be hand-delivered to the Office of the Secretary, One White Flint North, 11555 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland, between 7:30 a. m. and 4:15 p. m. on Federal workdays.

More detailed information is available in a notice published in the June 5 edition of the Federal Register.