

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, DC 20555
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234
Internet:opa@nrc.gov

No. 99-148

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Friday, July 16, 1999)

NRC TO REQUIRE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS TO ASSESS AND MANAGE INCREASES IN PLANT RISK BEFORE PERFORMING MAINTENANCE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is revising its Maintenance Rule to require that nuclear power plant licensees assess and manage the potential increase in risk that could result from proposed maintenance activities. At present, the rule says that licensees "should" perform such an assessment, but does not require it.

NRC took public comments on the proposed rule change last year and incorporated them in the final rule to be published in an upcoming edition of the Federal Register. The rule is scheduled to become effective 120 days following issuance of Revision 3 to Regulatory Guide 1.160, "Monitoring the Effectiveness of Maintenance at Nuclear Power Plants." Revision 3 to the Regulatory Guide is scheduled to be issued early next year.

NRC has long been concerned about a trend in the nuclear power industry to take key equipment out of service for maintenance while a plant is operating, without a thorough risk evaluation. Published NRC reports on 68 inspections conducted since the Maintenance Rule was first adopted in 1991 show that all nuclear power plant licensees have programs in place requiring a review of the risk impact on the plant before equipment is taken out of service for maintenance. But at seven sites, licensees had not performed such assessments, and at 35 others, assessment weaknesses were found.

The present rulemaking results from a directive given the NRC staff by the Commission after it was informed in 1997 that the Maintenance Rule language on safety assessments is permissive, rather than mandatory. Also at the Commission's direction, the amendment specifies that the Maintenance Rule applies during all conditions of plant operations, including shutdowns, and that assessments are to be performed for all maintenance activities.

###