

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. 99-176

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Friday, August 13, 1999)

***NRC PROPOSES ELIMINATING NON-COMBUSTIBILITY REQUIREMENT
FOR FIRE BARRIER PENETRATION SEALS AT NUCLEAR PLANTS***

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to amend its regulations to eliminate a requirement that nuclear power plant fire barrier penetration seal material be non-combustible, because the requirement is not believed to contribute significantly to safety. Other minor changes also have been proposed.

As part of the NRC's defense-in-depth philosophy for protecting nuclear power plants through the use of multiple safety barriers, the plants are divided into separate fire areas by fire-rated structural barriers designed to contain a fire and prevent its spread to other areas. Special fire barriers consisting of silicone foam are used to seal openings between fire barriers. The seals provide reasonable assurance that a fire will be confined to the area in which it starts and are designed to stop a fire long enough for it to be extinguished and for safety systems to activate.

Testing has shown that if fire barrier penetration seals are properly designed, tested, configured, installed, inspected and maintained, they are capable of preventing the spread of fire for several hours thus performing their intended safety function. Therefore, the NRC's technical staff and Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards - an independent body of technical experts that provides guidance to the Commission - agreed that the requirement in Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 50, Appendix R, be amended to eliminate the non-combustibility requirement for the seals.

Details of the proposed rule changes will be published in an upcoming edition of the *Federal Register*. The proposed rule will be posted to the NRC's homepage at: <http://ruleforum.llnl.gov> Interested persons are invited to submit written comments on the proposed rule within 75 days of its publication in the *Federal Register*. Comments should be sent to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555-0001, Attention: Rulemakings and Adjudications Staff. Comments may also be submitted electronically via the NRC's interactive rulemaking web site at <http://ruleforum.llnl.gov>.

##