

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC TO ALLOW DUKE ENERGY TO SUBMIT EARLY LICENSE RENEWAL APPLICATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has granted a request from the Duke Energy Corporation to allow the company to submit applications to renew the licenses for its McGuire Unit 2 and the two Catawba nuclear power plants earlier than usually permitted.

NRC regulations specify that license renewal applications may not be submitted to the Commission earlier than 20 years before the expiration of the current 40-year operating license. This limit is designed to ensure that sufficient operating experience is accumulated to identify any plant-specific aging concerns. However, in amending this license renewal rule in 1995, the Commission indicated it would consider an exemption to this requirement if sufficient information was available on a plant-specific basis to justify it.

By June 2001, the earliest date the NRC said it will accept a license renewal application from Duke, McGuire Unit 1 will have achieved the required 20 years of operation; Unit 2 will have 18.3 years; Catawba Unit 1 will have 16.5 years and 15.3 years for Unit 2. In a safety evaluation, the NRC determined that the operating experience of McGuire Unit 1, in conjunction with the substantial number of years for the other three units, should be sufficient to identify any aging concerns applicable to all four units.

McGuire, 17 miles south of Charlotte, N.C., and Catawba, six miles northwest of Rock Hill, S.C., are two-unit stations utilizing pressurized water reactors with ice-condenser containments having a rated power output of about 1130 megawatts each. The four plants are sufficiently similar in design, operation and maintenance that the operating experience of McGuire Unit 1 should apply to the other three units, according to the NRC staff.

In its request for early license renewal, Duke Energy explained that regular and systematic exchanges of information among its nuclear stations provide a means to continually improve plant programs. Duke Energy plans to submit license renewal requests for all four units simultaneously, to expedite processing and reduce costs.

The current operating license for McGuire Unit 1 expires in 2021, and for McGuire Unit 2, in 2023. The current operating license for Catawba Unit 1 expires in 2024, and for Unit 2, in 2026.

Once submitted, the license renewal applications will have to meet the same requirements NRC is using in evaluating other license renewal applications. If granted, the renewed licenses will have the effect of extending the operating life of each plant by as many as 20 years.

The exemption was published in the *Federal Register* October 8.

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