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NRC PROPOSES TO AMEND REQUIREMENTS FOR  
ONE SPENT FUEL STORAGE CASK DESIGN

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to amend its regulations to require inspection of certain welds and to specify a minimum weld thickness for one spent nuclear fuel storage cask design.

The amendment would implement a decision partially granting a petition from the Toledo Coalition for Safe Energy and others. It would affect the Vectra Technologies, Inc., NUHOMS-24P cask intended for use at the Davis-Besse nuclear power plant 21 miles from Toledo, Ohio.

Under NRC regulations, nuclear power plant licensees can use cask designs with an NRC certificate of compliance listed in the regulations to store spent fuel at the plants, under a general license and without site-specific approval.

After an opportunity for public comment, the NRC in December 1994 added the Vectra standardized NUHOMS-24P and NUHOMS-52B to the list of approved cask designs. Each NUHOMS system consists of a sealed, dry, shielded canister that contains the spent fuel assemblies. A loaded canister is stored inside a ventilated, horizontal, concrete module.

The petition from Toledo Coalition for Safe Energy and others raised concerns regarding the safety of the NUHOMS-24P casks because of a reduction in the thickness of welds in the walls of three canisters that had been fabricated for use at Davis-Besse.

In a February 1997 decision, Carl Paperiello, Director of NRC's Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, found that the minimum wall thickness measured by Vectra in the three canisters was less than the original design wall thickness specified in a company safety analysis report.

Vectra submitted calculations showing that its canister wall thickness still met industry code requirements and NRC design criteria.

The NRC Director's Decision said that, "while Vectra failed to comply with its commitment of 0.625 inches, its failure resulted in no compromise of safety. Nonetheless, the failure raised an issue of poor control during the fabrication process."

Mr. Paperiello further found that the company's lack of procedures to measure the final wall thickness in the area of the welds did not provide adequate assurance that minimum wall thickness was maintained. The decision said the Vectra certificate of compliance should be modified to require a fabrication inspection of the canister's welds.

The proposed changes would also reflect the transfer of the certificate of compliance from Vectra Technologies, Inc. to Transnuclear West, Inc. This action is in response to December 1997 letters from both companies describing the purchase by Transnuclear West of Vectra's intellectual properties and assets associated with the NUHOMS technology.

Interested persons are invited to submit comments on the proposed changes to the regulations within 75 days of a Federal Register notice on this subject, expected shortly. Written comments should be addressed to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 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>.

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