

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
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NRC TO REEXAMINE SPENT FUEL TRANSPORTATION  
CASK ACCIDENT STUDIES; MEETINGS SCHEDULED IN BETHESDA, MARYLAND  
AND HENDERSON, NEVADA

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has scheduled meetings on November 17 and December 8, in Bethesda, Maryland, and Henderson, Nevada, respectively, to seek public input into its proposed update of a 1987 study that examined the robustness of spent nuclear fuel transportation casks in accidents.

Historically, spent fuel shipments have a good safety record. Approximately 1300 spent fuel shipments have been made since 1971, with no radiological releases to the environment from accidents.

Over the next few years, NRC will revisit the conclusions of the 1987 study to assess its continued validity in light of several factors:

- The number of spent fuel shipments is expected to increase if a centralized spent fuel storage facility or the proposed high-level waste repository at Yucca Mountain begin operating;
- New spent fuel transportation cask designs have been introduced;
- New computer analytical tools assess accident scenarios and consequences in more detail;
- Accident statistics originally collected can be reexamined using more recent truck and rail accident data.

The reassessment also will allow the agency to develop a more risk-informed safety basis for cask licensing decisions, enabling the staff to focus more closely on those issues most important to safety.

The 1987 study, commonly known as the "modal study," relied on professional judgment and computer analyses, but no "actual" simulated accidents, to assess the robustness of the casks. Actual tests during this reassessment are an option, and the agency would like to have public views as to the need, importance or types of physical tests they believe should be performed.

The agency also would like the public to comment on those aspects of safety that they believe are the most important.

Spent nuclear fuel is currently transported in steel and lead truck and rail casks. NRC requires that the casks withstand a sequential series of tests designed to ensure their ability to withstand a range of accidents. They are analyzed for a 30-foot drop onto an unyielding surface, a drop onto a vertical steel bar, an engulfing 30-minute fire, and immersion under three feet of water.

The meeting on November 17 will be held at the Bethesda Hyatt, located at 7400 Wisconsin Avenue, from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

The meeting on December 8 in Henderson, Nevada, will be held at the Henderson Convention Center, at 200 Water Street, from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m (with a two-hour break at 4:30 p.m).

Both meetings will be conducted in a roundtable format, with a broad spectrum of participants involved in the discussion.

Copies of the original modal study, entitled "Shipping Container Response to Severe Highway and Railway Accident Conditions" (NUREG/CR-4829), and a brochure entitled "Transporting Spent Fuel" (NUREG/BR-0111), which describes the results and conclusions of the modal study, are available from the Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 37082, Washington, D.C., 20402-9328; telephone 202-512-1800.

Those wishing to obtain other background material and a detailed meeting agenda, can do so on the internet, at <http://ttd.sandia.gov/nrc/modal.htm>

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