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NRC CLARIFIES FITNESS-FOR-DUTY REQUIREMENTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is amending its requirements governing fitness for duty at licensed nuclear power plants.

The amendment clarifies the Commission's intent concerning the unacceptability of taking action against an individual that is based solely on the preliminary, unconfirmed results of a drug screening test. It also permits, under certain conditions, temporary administrative actions, up to temporary removal of an individual from unescorted access or from normal duties, based on an unconfirmed positive result from an initial screening test for marijuana or cocaine.

To minimize the impact of such administrative actions on those individuals whose onsite test is not subsequently confirmed, the Commission is requiring that the testing protocols and controls provide high levels of accuracy and reliability, that there be no loss of compensation or benefits pending completion of the testing process, and that there be no disclosure or record of any suspension based on a test that is not subsequently confirmed.

Under the current rule, an individual must be removed from unescorted access if there is any question concerning the individual's fitness to safely and competently perform duties.

The decision to clarify the existing fitness-for-duty requirements came after one licensee advised the NRC that it had implemented a fitness-for-duty program that included a provision for placing individuals in a non-work pay status on the basis of a positive but unconfirmed initial drug test.

The amendment to Part 26 will become effective on September 23.

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