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NRC AMENDS REGULATIONS TO REQUIRE EMERGENCY RESPONSE DATA SYSTEM AT LICENSED NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is amending its regulations to require licensed nuclear power plants to participate in an Emergency Response Data System (ERDS). The rule applies to all operating reactor power reactor facilities except Big Rock Point (which is exempt because the plant configuration does not permit collection of sufficient data to effectively participate in ERDS) and those that are permanently or indefinitely shut down.

ERDS is a direct electronic data link between computer data systems used by utilities licensed to operate nuclear power plants and the NRC's Operation Center and supplements the voice transmission of information over the currently-installed Emergency Notification System. It is to be activated by a licensee when an alert or higher-level emergency event occurs at a nuclear power plant.

The NRC needs this system to supplement the existing voice-only Emergency Notification System (ENS) to carry out its primary role ln the event of a nuclear power plant emergency which is to monitor licensee actions to ensure that recommendations are made with respect to offsite protective measures. In addition, the NRC is expected to provide technical analysis and logistical support to the licensee; support offsite authorities (including confirmation of a licensee's recommendation to these authorities); keep other Federal agencies informed of the status of the emergency; keep the media informed of the NRC's knowledge of the status of the emergency; and coordinate with other public affairs groups.

The voice-only ENS, which has been in place since shortly after the 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, has demonstrated that excessive amounts of time-are needed for routine transmission of data and for verification or correction of questionable data. In addition, errors have been attributed to the transcription and interpretation of voice-transmitted data.

The rule would require utility licensees to provide the necessary computer software to assemble the data and output communication port for each reactor unit in its on-site computer system. The required data on the plant conditions would be transmitted to the NRC Operations Center (NRCOC) in Bethesda, Maryland, via NRC-provided communication link hardware. The system

would be activated in the event of an alert, site area emergency or general emergency at a licensed nuclear power plant. Licensees would be required to have the system operable within 18 months of the effective date of this final rule or before initial escalation to full power, whichever comes later.

Under the ERDS voluntary program, States hove begun to request information concerning access to ERDS to obtain data during an emergency. The NRC staff is developing a Memorandum of Understanding which would provide a mechanism for the individual States to have access to the ERDS.

In August 1989, the NRC staff requested the voluntary participation of the licensees in the ERDS program. Currently, about half of licensed nuclear power plants have volunteered to participate in it. Over ten reactor units already are capable of transmitting ERDS data to the NRCOC. This rule will ensure an expeditious and successful implementation of the ERDS program at all units.

The revisions to Part 50 of the NRC's regulations will become effective on September 12, 1991.

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