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NRC CONSIDERS CHANGES TO REGULATIONS ON LOW-LEVEL  
RADIOACTIVE WASTE DISPOSAL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to amend its regulations on disposal of commercial low-level radioactive waste to specifically state that the regulations apply to the licensing of above-ground disposal facilities, such as above-ground vaults, as well as to the existing below-surface methods.

Above-ground facilities are on or protrude through the earth's surface without an earthen cover. Several states have indicated an interest in these alternative disposal methods for new facilities expected to be built in the next few years.

Part 61 of the Commission's current regulations establishes the basic framework for licensing land disposal of low-level radioactive wastes. Because the specific technical requirements and focus of the regulation were on near-surface disposal, the current wording of Part 61 has been interpreted as limiting the applicability of the regulation to disposal facilities that are covered with earth. However, no endorsement of a particular technology was intended.

The proposed rule would also correct Part 61 to require an applicant for a low-level waste disposal facility to develop a "quality assurance" program for the facility, consistent with original NRC staff intentions, rather than a "quality control" program as is currently required. Quality assurance is a broader term that encompasses quality control and also includes managerial controls and audits.

Interested persons are invited to submit written comments on the proposed rule by April 6, 1992 (30 days after publication of a notice in the Federal Register on March 6, 1992). The comments should be addressed to the Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.

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