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NRC AMENDS REGULATIONS FOR URANIUM ENRICHMENT FACILITIES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is changing its regulations to conform its requirements regarding regulation of uranium enrichment facilities to recent amendments to the Atomic Energy Act.

Prior to the amendments to the Act, uranium enrichment facilities would have been licensed under the same part of the Commission's regulations as nuclear power plants. Under the amended Act they will be licensed under the portions dealing with other uses of nuclear materials.

Uranium must be enriched in the isotope uranium-235, whose atoms readily undergo fission and are therefore suitable for a chain reaction, before it can be used as a fuel in the type of nuclear power plants commonly used in the United States.

There are no NRC-licensed enrichment plants in the country at the present time. All U.S. enrichment facilities are owned by the Department of Energy and are not subject to NRC regulation. However, on January 31, 1991, the NRC received an application from Louisiana Energy Services for a license to construct and operate a facility for enrichment of uranium using the gas centrifuge process. There is also a possibility, over a longer term, that legislation will be enacted that would put all or part of the Department of Energy's enrichment facilities under the jurisdiction of NRC regulations.

A proposed rule on this subject was published in the Federal Register for comment on September 16, 1991. No substantive changes were made as a result of the comments received.

The final rule will be effective on May 29, 1992 (30 days after publication in the Federal Register on April 29, 1992).

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