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NRC PROPOSES TO AMEND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT RULES TO GOVERN
NUCLEAR POWER PLANT LICENSE RENEWALS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to amend its environmental impact regulations concerning the renewal of existing operating licenses for nuclear power plants. At the same time, the Commission is issuing, in draft form, supporting documents, including a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (NUREG-1437), a regulatory analysis, a regulatory guide and an environmental standard review plan.

The proposed amendments conclude, subject to certain conditions, that the renewal of a nuclear power plant operating license for up to a single period of 20 years would have accrued benefits that outweigh the economic, environmental and social costs. This conclusion would be applicable to any nuclear power plant licensed for operation as of June 30, 1992, and to five additional plants under active construction.

In the draft generic impact statement, the NRC staff identified and evaluated the significance of the environmental impact of 104 environmental issues associated with the renewal of individual plant licenses. For 80 issues, the staff reached a generic conclusion that the potential environmental impacts are acceptable. For 22 issues, this conclusion was reached for some nuclear power plants that are within certain conditions defined in the draft generic impact statement. A determination of whether the certain conditions are met would be made on a case-by-case basis. For 2 issues, the staff concluded that no generic conclusion on impacts could be reached. These would be reviewed in full in each case.

The amendments also would delete the present requirement for the NRC to prepare an environmental impact statement for every license renewal review and permit the use of an environmental assessment. However, if it isn't possible to make a finding of no significant impact, an environmental impact statement would be required.

Broad issues that would have to be addressed if they exceed certain parameters include surface-water quality, aquatic ecology, groundwater, terrestrial ecology, human health, socioeconomic, waste management and transportation.

Written comments on the proposed amendments to Part 51 of the Commission's regulations and the draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement should be received by December 16. They should be addressed to the Secretary of the Commission, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555: Docketing and Service Branch.

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