

No. 93-83
Tel. 301-504-2240

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Tuesday, June 22, 1993)

NRC TO CONDUCT ENVIRONMENTAL SCOPING PROCESS
ON RADIOLOGICAL CRITERIA FOR DECOMMISSIONING

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has announced its intention to prepare a generic environmental impact statement on radiological criteria for decommissioning of NRC-licensed nuclear facilities. The agency will hold public scoping meetings at four locations to obtain public input on preparation of the statement.

The Commission expects to develop regulations containing standards for release of contaminated sites for unrestricted use after levels of radioactive contamination have been appropriately reduced. Development of criteria would provide a clear and consistent regulatory basis for determining the extent to which radioactive materials must be removed from lands and structures before a site can be released.

Current NRC regulations do not explicitly contain radiological criteria for decommissioning. The agency is presently using criteria and practices contained in several NRC guidance documents. Pending issuance of a final regulation, the NRC will continue to use the existing criteria and practices on a site-specific basis, with emphasis on achieving residual contamination levels that are as low as reasonably achievable. If a licensee or responsible party has cleaned up a site, or was in the process of cleaning up a site, under an NRC-approved decommissioning plan, the NRC will not require the licensee to conduct additional cleanup in response to new NRC criteria or standards established after NRC approval of the plan, unless additional contamination, or noncompliance with the approved plan, is found showing a significant threat to the public health and safety.

The Commission believes that codifying radiological criteria for decommissioning in the NRC's regulations, rather than continuing to use existing guidance, would:

(1) Result in more efficient use of NRC and licensee resources,

(2) Lead to more consistent and uniform regulation of decommissioning,

(3) Provide a more stable basis for decommissioning planning,

(4) Eliminate protracted delays in decommissioning and

(5) Provide an opportunity to reassess the basis for the residual contamination levels contained in existing guidance in light of changes in basic radiation protection standards and decommissioning experience obtained during the last 15 years.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the NRC will prepare a generic environmental impact statement to analyze alternatives for establishing by regulation radiological criteria for decommissioning of licensed nuclear facilities. The public scoping process and associated public scoping meetings will help the NRC to be sure it has considered the potential courses of action and the associated costs and impacts, including environmental impacts such as groundwater contamination, that the public believes the agency should analyze and include in the draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement.

Opportunities for the public to participate in the scoping process include:

(1) Attending the public scoping meetings and making verbal or written comments on the proposed action and possible alternatives. The meetings will be held from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. as follows:

- Washington, D.C. -- July 21, 1993, at the Holiday Inn, 8120 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, Md.
- San Francisco -- July 26, 1993, in Room 1194 of the State Building, 455 Golden Gate Avenue.
- Oklahoma City -- July 27, 1993, at the Holiday Inn North, 12001 Northeast Expressway.
- Cleveland -- July 28, 1993, at the Cleveland State University, University Center Auditorium Room 6, 212 Euclid Avenue.

(2) Submitting written comments on the proposed action and alternatives. The comments should be submitted by August 15, 1993, to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555, Attention: Docketing and Services Branch.

The NRC previously held seven workshops in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco, Dallas, Atlanta and Washington, D.C., as part of an enhanced participatory rulemaking process on radiological criteria for decommissioning. The

workshops and related comments will be considered during the scoping process, and comments need not be resubmitted.

A Federal Register notice published on June 18, 1993, lists topics to be addressed during the scoping process. At the conclusion of the process, a summary of the significant issues identified, and determinations and conclusions reached, will be sent to each participant.

#