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NRC PROPOSES CHANGES TO REDUCE REGULATORY BURDEN

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to make several changes to its regulations as a result of an agency review conducted to determine whether regulatory burdens can be reduced without in any way reducing protection of the public health and safety and the common defense and security.

The NRC has an on-going commitment to ensure that its regulatory program does not impose unnecessary burdens on its licensees unless justified for safety reasons. As a part of that program, the NRC some years ago created a Committee to Review Generic Requirements (CRGR). This committee reviews proposed regulations, including a regulatory impact analysis of costs and benefits. The Commission also has adopted a rule (Part 52) to streamline the licensing process for future standardized nuclear power plants. Another measure intended to improve the efficiency of the NRC regulatory program is a draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement which systematically considers the costs and benefits of extending the operating life of current light water reactors.

The latest review of regulations responded to two Presidential memoranda of January 28, 1992, which requested all Federal agencies to evaluate existing regulations and programs and to identify and accelerate initiatives that would eliminate any unnecessary burden on the regulated community or otherwise promote economic growth.

The review was done by the Committee to Review Generic Requirements, which drew upon the agency's previous studies and solicited comments from the public, other agencies and the NRC staff. A Federal Register notice seeking public comment was published on February 24, 1992, and a second Federal Register notice on March 23, 1992, discussed likely or possible candidates for action, based on CRGR's preliminary evaluation of comments. An associated public meeting was held on March 27, 1992, in Bethesda, Md.

After completing their review, the CRGR recommended revising the regulations in eight areas. The suggested revisions address the frequency of reporting information about power reactors, clarify and update regulations pertaining to certain material licensees, and remove unnecessary requirements in the regulations.

The NRC is proposing amendments to the regulations to implement the eight areas identified by the CRGR. The proposed changes to reduce the regulatory burden deal with:

(1) Frequency of Final Safety Analysis Report updates--Licensees would have the option of reducing the updating from annually to once per refueling outage (normally every 18 to 24 months).

(2) Annual design change reports--Again licensees would reduce the submission of reports from annually to once per refueling outage.

(3) Elimination of unnecessary event reports--About 150 invalid engineered safety feature actuation events would no longer have to be reported.

(4) Use of fuel with Zirconium-based (other than Zircaloy) cladding--The NRC staff estimates that six plants may ask to use this alternative cladding.

(5) Frequency of radiological effluent reports--Licensees would submit reports annually rather than semi-annually on the quantity of principal radioactive materials released off-site in liquid and gaseous form.

(6) Receipt back of processed low-level waste--This proposal was previously announced in a Federal Register notice dated April 24, 1992. It would allow nuclear reactor licensees to receive back at the reactor site low-level radioactive waste that was generated at the site, but sent off-site for compaction or incineration to reduce the waste's volume.

(7) Contamination monitoring of packages--A new requirement in Part 20 of the Commission's regulations for licensees to check the external surfaces of packages for radioactive contamination would be eliminated for packages containing radioactive gases or containing radioactive material in a sealed form.

(8) Posting of rooms occupied by diagnostic nuclear medicine patients--This proposal would reduce the posting requirements for hospital rooms occupied by patients administered radioactive materials who might otherwise be released from confinement.

Further details on the proposed amendments in all the above areas except number 3, elimination of unnecessary event reports,

and number 6, receipt back of processed low-level waste, are contained in a Federal Register notice published on June 18. Interested persons are invited to submit written comments by July 20, 1992, to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.

The proposed rule on elimination of unnecessary event reports will be announced separately, and the proposed rule on receipt back of processed low-level waste has already been announced.

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