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Tel. 301/504-2240

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NRC CONSIDERS CHANGES TO EMERGENCY PLANNING REQUIREMENTS FOR SPENT FUEL STORAGE FACILITIES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering amending its regulations to include emergency planning requirements for certain types of facilities that temporarily store spent fuel from commercial nuclear power plants.

These facilities, called independent spent fuel storage installations and monitored retrievable storage facilities, could be used to supplement the water-filled basins at individual reactor sites around the country where used fuel is being stored primarily at this time, pending development of a permanent repository by the Department of Energy.

An independent spent fuel storage installation (ISFSI) is a complex designed and constructed for the interim storage of spent nuclear fuel and other associated radioactive materials. Currently there are seven of these facilities in the United States.

A monitored retrievable storage (MRS) facility is a complex designed, constructed and operated by DOE for the storage of spent nuclear fuel, pending shipment to a high-level waste repository. DOE has not yet developed an MRS.

The proposed amendments are needed to ensure that, in the event of an accident at an ISFSI or MRS, appropriate action will be taken. The changes are intended to provide a level of preparedness at these facilities that is consistent with the NRC's defense-in-depth philosophy.

An ISFSI could be located either on a reactor site or at another location. Currently there are six ISFSI's at reactor sites and one at another location. For an ISFSI that is to be licensed for a stand-alone operation, the proposed rule would require an emergency plan. However, since the postulated worst-case accident involving an ISFSI has insignificant consequences

to the public health and safety, the proposed regulations would require only onsite emergency plans and not formal offsite plans.

-2-

For an ISFSI located on a reactor site, the potential consequences of a worst-case accident would be inconsequential when compared with those involving the reactor itself. In addition, currently existing reactor emergency plans, which are required under the Commission's regulations, cover all at-reactor ISFSI's. Therefore, additional requirements are not being proposed for these facilities.

For an MRS facility, according to the NRC's analysis of potential onsite and offsite consequences of accidental releases associated with the operation, the maximum dose to a member of the public due to an accidental release of radioactive materials would likely not exceed 1 rem, which is one-fifth of the yearly dose limit for radiation workers. However, a final design for an MRS has not been selected, and an MRS is expected to have a broader scope of activities than an ISFSI. Because the level of threat to the public health and safety from an MRS may exceed that from an ISFSI, the Commission believes it is appropriate to require enhanced offsite emergency planning for an MRS.

Therefore, the proposed rule for an MRS would mandate a minimum level of offsite emergency response capability, including enhanced communications with offsite authorities, the ability to assess and monitor accident consequences offsite, and training for offsite personnel.

Interested persons are invited to submit comments on the proposed changes to Part 72 of the Commission's regulations by August 4, 1993 (75 days after publication in the Federal Register on May 21, 1993). The comments should be addressed to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.

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