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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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NRC STAFF DIRECTS SOME LICENSEES TO ASSURE REPORTING  
OF LOSS OF CONTROLS TO PREVENT ACCIDENTAL CRITICALITIES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has directed licensees who possess more than a critical mass of special nuclear material (uranium and plutonium) to inform the staff of their procedures and criteria for assuring that any breakdowns in controls designed to prevent accidental criticalities (nuclear chain reactions) are promptly evaluated and reported to licensee management and, where necessary, to the NRC.

The action follows a potential criticality event at General Electric Company's uranium fuels fabrication plant in Wilmington, North Carolina, in May 1991 and two, earlier advisory notices on criticality safety issued by the NRC staff in March 1989 and October 1990.

Specifically, these licensees are being asked to evaluate their criticality safety criteria and procedures, modify them as necessary to assure that events involving degradation or loss of controls will be promptly evaluated and reported to licensee management and the NRC staff, if appropriate, and provide a description of their criteria and procedures to the staff within 90 days.

Examples of events related to criticality which must be reported to the NRC within 24 hours include:

Complete loss of a controlled parameter (such as favorable geometry, the use of poisons, mass concentration or automatic engineered systems);

Substantial degradation of a controlled parameter;

Failure of a controlled parameter previously identified by the NRC staff or the licensee's criticality safety specialists as requiring reporting upon failure;

Determination that a criticality safety analysis was deficient in evaluating actual plant conditions and necessary controlled parameters were not established; and

An unusual event or condition for which the severity and remedy are not readily determined.

Licensees subject to the requirements of the staff's Bulletin are:

Advanced Nuclear Fuels Corporation, Richland, Washington; Babcock and Wilcox Company (Commercial Nuclear Fuel Plant, Naval Nuclear Fuel Division and Naval Nuclear Fuel Research Laboratory), Lynchburg, Virginia; Combustion Engineering, Inc. (Power Systems), Hematite, Missouri, and Windsor, Connecticut; General Atomics, San Diego; General Electric Company, Wilmington, North Carolina; Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc., Erwin, Tennessee; UNC, Inc., Uncasville, Connecticut; and Westinghouse Electric Corporation, Columbia, South Carolina.

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