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NRC AMENDS REQUIREMENTS GOVERNING RENEWAL OF LICENSES  
OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANT AND NON-POWER REACTOR OPERATORS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is amending its requirements governing the renewal of licenses of nuclear power plant and non-power reactor operators.

The amendments eliminate the present requirement for a licensed operator at power, test and research reactors to pass a comprehensive requalification written examination and operating test conducted by the NRC staff during the term of a six-year license as a prerequisite for license renewal.

Instead, requalification examinations will continue to be conducted by individual facility licensees who employ the operators. The existing NRC resources will be devoted to inspection and oversight of required facility requalification activities.

The amendments reflect experience gained since the requirement was put in place in May 1987 when:

-- the term for operator licenses was changed from two to six years;

-- operating tests had to be conducted on plant reference simulators when they either were new or still under construction; and

-- requalification programs were permitted to be based on a systems approach to training when the industry had not yet implemented the process for accrediting these programs.

Experience with this program has shown that NRC examiners largely are duplicating tasks already required of and routinely performed by the facility licensees as part of their requalification program.

In addition, in 1988, the NRC staff revised its requalification examination procedures to focus on performance-based evaluation criteria which enabled it to conduct

comprehensive examinations for the purpose of renewing an individual operator's license and, at the same time, to use the results of the individual operator requalification examinations to determine the adequacy of a facility licensee's requalification training program.

Since 1987, the pass rates for individual operator requalification examinations have increased from 83 to 91 percent and the pass rate for facility licensees' requalification training programs have increased from 81 to 90 percent.

Further, the staff has seen a general improvement in the quality of the facility licensees' testing materials and in the performance of the facility test evaluators. Of the first 79 programs evaluated, 10 were found to be unsatisfactory; since that time, an additional 120 programs have been evaluated and only six additional programs were found to be unsatisfactory.

The amendment also requires facility licensees to submit, on request and consistent with the NRC staff's inspection program needs, a copy of their annual operating tests or comprehensive written examinations used for operator requalification to the NRC so that the staff can ensure that they conform to NRC requirements. The tests and examinations will be used, together with other information already available to the staff, to determine the scope of an annual on-site requalification inspection.

The amendment to Part 55 of the Commission's regulations will become effective on March 11.

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