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Tel. 301/415-8200

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NRC CHANGES EMERGENCY PLANNING REQUIREMENTS FOR  
SPENT FUEL STORAGE FACILITIES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is 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, may be used to supplement the water-filled basins at individual reactor sites around the country where used fuel is being stored, 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 eight of these facilities in the United States.

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

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

An ISFSI may be located at either a reactor site or another location. Currently there are seven ISFSI's at reactor sites and one at another location. For an ISFSI that is licensed for a stand-alone operation, the rule requires an emergency plan.

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 ISFSI's co-located at reactor sites. Therefore, additional requirements are not being proposed for these facilities.

For an MRS facility, according to the NRC's analysis of potential on-site 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 conceivably exceed that from an ISFSI, the Commission believes it is appropriate to require enhanced offsite emergency planning for an MRS.

Therefore, the rule for an MRS mandates 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.

A proposed rule on this subject was published in the Federal Register for comment on May 24, 1993. The final rule reflects consideration of the comments received.

The new regulations will be effective on September 20 (90 days after publication of a Federal Register notice announcing the rule change on June 22).

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