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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NUCLEAR INDUSTRY SEEKS CHANGES IN NRC
QUALITY ASSURANCE RULES FOR NUCLEAR PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is requesting public comments on a petition from the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) asking the Commission to amend its regulations to permit nuclear power plant licensees, under certain conditions, to change their quality assurance programs without prior NRC approval.

NEI is a trade organization seeking to establish unified policies on matters affecting the nuclear energy industry. Its members include all utilities licensed to operate commercial nuclear power plants in the U.S.

The proposed amendment would permit a licensee to change its quality program if it could show by analysis that the change does not involve an unreviewed safety question or alter the license requirements under which a plant operates.

Existing requirements allow licensees to change their quality assurance programs so long as any previous commitment is not reduced. For changes that do involve a reduction, NRC approval is required. NEI contends that the NRC sometimes requires prior approval whatever the degree of safety significance. Frequently, NEI says, licensees get into a prolonged interaction with NRC over what constitutes a "reduction in commitment," distracting both from more significant safety matters.

NEI says its proposed rule change is consistent with the overall objectives of the National Performance Review conducted by Vice President Gore to identify rules that are unnecessarily burdensome, obsolete or too prescriptive.

In addition to public comments on the petition, the NRC also is requesting comment on several specific quality assurance issues related to the petition. These responses will help the staff develop its own position on the NEI petition.

A copy of the petition can be obtained by writing to the Rules Review and Directives Branch, Office of Administration, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555.

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Comments on the petition and the specific issues raised by the NRC staff should be received by November 28. Written comments should be directed to the Secretary, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch. A notice of NRC receipt of the petition was published in the Federal Register on September 14.

Comments also may be submitted electronically, in either ASCII text or WordPerfect format (version 5.1 or later), by calling the NRC Electronic Rulemaking Bulletin Board (BBS) on FedWorld. If using a personal computer and modem, the NRC rulemaking subsystem on FedWorld can be accessed directly by dialing 1-800-303-9672. The NRC subsystem on FedWorld also can be accessed by a direct dial phone number for the main FedWorld BBS, 1-703-321-3339 or by using Telnet via Internet: fedworld.gov.

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