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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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NRC MAY AMEND RULE GOVERNING RELEASE OF RADIOACTIVE  
MATERIALS TO SANITARY SEWER SYSTEMS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is seeking comments, information and recommendations from interested parties to use in making a determination on the need to revise its regulation governing the disposal of radioactive materials from NRC-licensed facilities into sanitary sewer systems.

Currently, Part 20 of the Commission's regulations permits the disposal of specified amounts of readily soluble materials or readily dispersible biological materials into sanitary sewer systems.

Prior to 1991, Part 20 permitted the disposal of soluble or readily dispersible materials. However, the NRC staff and the Agreement States (29 states which have assumed, by agreement, part of the NRC's regulatory authority) became aware of several instances where radioactive material in particulate form was detected in sanitary sewage systems.

These cases did not appear to result in radiation levels exceeding the public dose limits but the existence of radioactive materials from releases to sanitary sewers was a cause for concern and resulted in the 1991 amendment to Part 20.

More recently, radioactive contamination was detected in a sanitary sewer system owned and operated by the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS) in Cleveland, Ohio, during an aerial survey of a nearby NRC-licensed facility.

Since then, NEORS has petitioned the Commission to, among other things, amend Part 20 to require 24 hours advance notice to the appropriate sewage treatment plant before releasing radioactive material to the sanitary sewer system and to exempt radioactive materials that enter the sanitary waste stream from the requirements of Part 20 restricting the incineration of radioactive materials.

The NRC staff also has received a report prepared by one of its contractors which evaluates situations where radioactivity

has been reported in sewer systems or sewer treatment sludge, analyzes various scenarios whereby members of the public could be exposed to radiation from material deposited in sewer systems and presents limiting, highly-conservative scenarios for each of the case histories analyzed.

Based on the results of study, the staff concluded that it needed more information and has let a new contract to obtain additional data. This new study is examining the processes which could lead to reconcentration of radioactive materials under the new Part 20 limits which went into effect this year, taking into consideration the newer waste water treatment systems in use today. In addition, it is anticipated that the study will develop estimates of reconcentration factors for various radioactive materials. Results are expected to be available in about a year.

With this background, and in order to address the potential impacts on licensees' operations due to any additional restrictions on the release of radioactive materials to sewers, the Commission is particularly interested in receiving public comments on four specific issues:

- the form of the radioactive materials acceptable for disposal;

- the total quantity of radioactive material which could be released annually by a licensee;

- the type of limits which should be imposed, such as the use of a dose limit instead of the present activity limit; and

- the continuation of exemptions for patient excreta.

Written comments on these and other related issues should be received by May 26 and should be addressed to the Secretary of the Commission, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.