

No. 95-98
Tel. 301/415-8200

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Wednesday, August 16, 1995)

NRC VOLUNTARY TRIAL PROGRAM TO ASSESS
PROPOSED CHANGES TO OPERATOR LICENSING PROCESS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will conduct a six-month voluntary trial program aimed at assessing proposed changes to the way the agency administers examinations for nuclear power plant operator and senior operator license applicants.

Historically, the NRC staff has determined the level of knowledge and abilities of the applicants for operator licenses by conducting examinations developed fully by the NRC. Licensees have been limited to reviewing and validating these examinations before they were given. Licensee improvements in operator training and performance, as well as agency streamlining efforts, have prompted the NRC to reconsider its approach to the licensing program.

The NRC staff's intent is to conduct a trial program where licensees who volunteer to participate would be allowed the option of drafting written examinations and operating tests tailored to their individual plants. As part of this program, the NRC will review and approve the licensees' proposed written examinations and independently review and conduct the hands-on operating tests. Licensees will conduct the written examinations. The NRC will grade the written examinations and the hands-on operating tests and make the final licensing decisions.

The voluntary program will run from October 1995 through March 1996. Licensees who request operator examinations during the trial period will be contacted by regional offices to determine their interest in participating in the program and to explain it thoroughly.

The licensing process change is expected to result in significant resource savings for the NRC because licensee employees, who are more familiar with their plant and its procedures, will be able to develop first-hand examination questions more effectively. Examinations prepared by the NRC staff or contract examiners require extensive research of plant-

specific designs, operating procedures and technical specifications.

If the trial program goes well and the approach is approved by the Commission, it is the NRC staff's intention to implement the licensee-developed examination process in October 1996.

#