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Tel. 301-504-2240

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#### NRC PLANS IMPROVEMENTS IN PUBLIC PETITION PROCESS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission plans to improve its primary mechanism for the public to raise potential safety issues involving NRC-licensed facilities.

The 2.206 petition process, contained in Part 2 of NRC's regulations, provides members of the public with the means to request investigation and resolution of potential health and safety problems with facilities that have been licensed by NRC. Consistent with current efforts to enhance public participation in the decisionmaking process, the Commission undertook a review of the 2.206 process to make it more effective, understandable and as credible as possible. For the first time since the inception of the 2.206 process in 1974, NRC re-examined the process in a systematic manner and obtained comments from the public at a workshop held last July.

As a result, the NRC staff will be adopting procedures to increase meaningful participation of the petitioner in the 2.206 process and improve communications between the NRC and petitioner. Petitioners complained that after filing a petition, they had no further participation or information as the staff reviewed the petition, often with the affected licensee. Therefore, in addition to being kept informed of the status of the petition and being provided with a copy of the licensee's response to the petition, petitioners will be given an opportunity to participate in NRC-licensee meetings on the petition.

There will also be a provision for offering an informal public hearing at an open meeting on petitions which present new information on, or a new approach to evaluating a significant safety issue. These criteria will be applicable also to petitions that allege violations of NRC requirements. If warranted, the NRC will take action to resolve a public health or safety problem prior to resolution of the 2.206 petition.

The new provisions will further strengthen recently revised procedures that already provide for prompt handling of petitions, and designation of a staff contact for the petition. An electronic bulletin board will provide petitioners and the

general public with an up-to-date status of pending 2.206 petitions.

A formal Director's Decision, signed by the Director of the appropriate program office, will continue to set forth results of staff reviews governing 2.206 petitions. However, for qualifying petitions, the Director now will have the additional benefit of information elicited from the informal public hearing.

An NRC Management Directive will be prepared setting forth staff practices and procedures governing the 2.206 process and, to make the revised practices and procedures readily available, these will be described in an information pamphlet for petitioners and the general public.

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