

No. 94-3
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Monday, January 10, 1994)

NRC STAFF ASKS UTILITY LICENSEES FOR ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION ON THERMO-LAG FIRE BARRIER MATERIALS

The NRC staff has sent letters to utility owners of nuclear power reactors asking them to submit additional information on the use of Thermo-Lag fire barrier materials in their facilities.

In June and August 1992, the staff sent Bulletins to all utilities operating nuclear power plants advising them of failed fire tests of Thermo-Lag fire barriers and that the failure of these tests called into question the ability of the barriers to meet NRC fire protection requirements.

In response to these Bulletins, licensees that used Thermo-Lag fire barriers declared them inoperable and implemented measures, such as fire watches, to compensate for the inoperable condition.

In December 1992, the staff sent a Generic Letter to utilities using Thermo-Lag fire barriers identifying specific concerns about their use. In their responses to the Generic Letters, the utilities indicated that actions necessary to restore their Thermo-Lag fire barriers to an operable condition would be based on the results of the Thermo-Lag fire test program being coordinated by the Nuclear Management and Resources Council (NUMARC).

During recent meetings with the NRC staff, NUMARC officials have described the scope of the test program, reported the results of recently-completed tests and presented plans for additional tests. The NUMARC program, however, is limited to certain fire barrier configurations and the development of guidance for applying the test results to plant-specific fire barrier configurations and it is not intended to cover all in-plant Thermo-Lag fire barrier configurations.

Based on the limited scope of the NUMARC program and the results of the fire tests completed to date, the staff has concluded that this program alone may not be sufficient to resolve, at many plants, all of the issues raised in the December 1992 Generic Letter. Therefore, licensees relying on NUMARC's

program may need to take actions above and beyond that program to address fire endurance and ampacity derating concerns with their in-plant Thermo-Lag barriers.

Accordingly, the recent letter is intended to assure that licensees fully evaluate the applicability of the NUMARC testing program to their facilities and to help assure the timely resolution of the Thermo-Lag issues at each plant.

Specifically, the letters ask for information on the configurations and amounts of Thermo-Lag fire barriers installed in each plant; how the NUMARC test results will be applied; how configurations particular to an individual plant will be addressed; what alternatives are available for configurations that, when tested, may not demonstrate satisfactory performance or cannot be upgraded; and plans and schedules for resolving the issues identified in the December 1992 Generic Letter.

The NRC staff will use this information, which must be submitted under oath or affirmation within 45 days of receipt of the letter, to review the proposed NUMARC guidance for evaluating and upgrading Thermo-Lag fire barriers and to assess the plant-specific plans for resolving outstanding issues.

In the meantime, licensees will continue to maintain the compensatory measure implemented in response to the two Bulletins. These measures will continue to provide an adequate level of fire safety until corrective actions are identified and implemented.

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