

No. 93-01  
Tel. 301/504-2240

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Friday, January 8, 1993)

NRC TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERNATIONAL  
NUCLEAR EVENT NUMERICAL SCALE ON TRIAL BASIS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has decided to participate in a limited way in the use of an international nuclear event scale for accidents or incidents at U.S. commercial nuclear power reactors. The NRC envisions using the scale on a trial basis for a two-year period.

During the trial period, the NRC will communicate the severity levels of U.S. reactor events to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), using the international scale. At the same time, the NRC will continue to inform the public by applying its own four-level response scale, from least to most significant: 1) Unusual Event; 2) Alert; 3) Site Area Emergency; 4) General Emergency.

The objective of a seven-tiered numerical scale developed by the IAEA is to communicate promptly and consistently to the public the safety significance of reported events at nuclear facilities. The scale is not an emergency response tool. After several years of development, the IAEA in Vienna, Austria declared last March that it was recommending widespread use of the numerical scale.

Within its limited participation, the NRC will consider the sequence of events of an emergency and assign it a rating from the international scale. The NRC will submit ratings to IAEA only for those events at nuclear power plants that are classified as an alert or higher on the emergency response scale used in the United States. This should occur about one week after termination of the emergency to prevent any confusion with the NRC's own classification scale.

The lower levels of the international scale, 1 to 3, are referred to as "incidents" while the upper levels, 4 to 7, are termed "accidents." In order of increasing severity, the scale is: 1) Anomaly; 2) Incident; 3) Serious incident; 4) Accident without significant off-site risk; 5) Accident with off-site risk; 6) Serious accident; 7) Major accident.

In other countries the IAEA scale is applied to power reactors and is being considered, on a trial basis, for other nuclear applications, such as fuel cycle facilities and radioactive material transportation.

At the end of the trial period, the NRC will decide on continued participation in the scale.

#