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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NRC PROPOSES TO CERTIFY GE NUCLEAR ENERGY'S
ADVANCED BOILING WATER REACTOR DESIGN

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering amending its regulations to certify the U.S. Advanced Boiling Water Reactor design developed by GE Nuclear Energy. Interested persons are invited to attend a public meeting to be held May 11 in Rockville, Maryland, on the proposed rule and to submit written comments or request an informal hearing before an NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board.

No application for a construction permit or combined license using the U.S. ABWR standard design has been filed with the NRC, and issuance of this regulation would not authorize construction of any specific new nuclear power plant.

However, if the Commission decides to issue the rule in final form and certify the U.S. ABWR design, a utility that wishes to build and operate a new nuclear power plant could choose to use the design and reference it in an application for a construction permit or combined license. Safety issues within the scope of the certified design would then not be subject to litigation, although site-specific environmental impacts associated with building and operating the plant at a particular location would be litigable.

The NRC first approved the design of the U.S. ABWR in July. This approval was necessary before the standard design could be certified in the regulations. If the Commission decides to issue a final rule certifying the U.S. ABWR design, it will be valid for 15 years.

The GE Nuclear Energy application for certification was reviewed for compliance with applicable portions of the Commission's current regulations, except the U.S. ABWR would be exempt from five regulations (primarily requirements established after the Three Mile Island accident that are not needed for this design).

The proposed rule also contains additional requirements for the U.S. ABWR design (over and above requirements for the current generation of reactors). They include requirements for design features that would enable the U.S. ABWR to mitigate the effects of severe accidents if they occur.

Future applicants for a construction permit or combined license could make plant-specific changes to portions of the standard U.S. ABWR design by following the procedures set out in the proposed rule. The applicant or licensee would be required to maintain records of all such changes until the license is terminated.

Further details of the proposed rule are contained in a Federal Register notice published on April 7.

Copies of U.S. ABWR design information submitted by GE Nuclear Energy are available for review and copying at the NRC Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, NW, Washington, DC.

The May 11 public meeting will be held in the Commission's auditorium at 11545 Rockville Pike. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m., followed by an introduction and background presentation at 9:00 and a question and answer session at 9:30.

Interested persons are invited to submit written comments on the proposed regulation to the Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch. The comments should be received by August 7 (120 days following publication of the Federal Register notice).

Interested persons may also request an informal hearing before an NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board on matters related to the design certification rulemaking. The request should be submitted, by August 7, to the Secretary of the Commission at the above address.

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