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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NRC PROPOSES MAXIMUM PERMISSIBLE RADIATION LEVELS
FOR LICENSE TERMINATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering amending its regulations to establish maximum permissible radiation levels when a nuclear facility permanently shuts down and is released for other uses. The agency is seeking public comments on the proposed amendments and a related environmental impact statement.

Commission regulations require licensees of permanently shutdown facilities to reduce radioactivity to safe enough levels to permit termination of the license. Currently the regulations permit license termination only if radioactivity remaining on the site permits unrestricted use of the property.

Under the proposed rule, release of the property would be either:

- Unrestricted, in which case it could be used for any purpose, or
- Restricted, so that it could not be used for certain purposes (such as residential housing).

Under the proposed new regulations, a site could be released for unrestricted use if the radiation dose from contamination remaining on the property would be no more than 15 millirems per year. (This may be compared to a dose of about 5 millirems of background radiation from a cross-country airline flight, or about 10 millirems per year from living in a brick rather than a wood house.) In addition, the dose would have to be as far below this limit as reasonably achievable.

The proposed regulations would permit release of a site for restricted use if the radiation dose would be no more than 15 millirems per year with institutional controls (such as deed restrictions). Even in the unlikely event these controls fail, the dose could not exceed 100 millirems per year.

Restricted-use release would not be permitted unless the licensee:

(1) Demonstrates that further reductions in residual radioactivity necessary to comply with the 15-millirem-per-year limit for unrestricted use are not technically achievable, would be prohibitively expensive, or would result in net public or environmental harm;

(2) Makes adequate provisions for institutional controls after license termination to reduce the annual radiation dose from residual radioactivity to 15 millirems per year;

(3) Provides sufficient financial assurance to allow an independent third party to carry out any necessary control and maintenance of the site after license termination; and

(4) Convenes a "Site Specific Advisory Board" to obtain advice from affected parties. This Board would consist of about 10 members plus an ex officio representative from the Commission. It would provide a mechanism for local citizens and other affected parties to be directly involved in decisions regarding the site.

NRC's current regulations do not explicitly address maximum radiation levels (or "radiological criteria") necessary for permanently removing a nuclear facility from service, reducing remaining radioactivity levels and releasing the property for other uses (or "decommissioning"). Until new criteria such as the ones in the proposed rule have been approved in final form and are put into effect, the Commission will continue to review and approve decommissioning on a site-specific basis, using existing criteria, as indicated in a Federal Register notice published on April 16, 1992.

In order to provide additional opportunities for public comment, the proposed rule provides that when the Commission receives a decommissioning plan from a licensee, or a proposal for restricted release of a site, the agency would publish a notice in the Federal Register and local newspapers or other media soliciting comments. It would also notify appropriate local and state governments and Indian Nations and solicit their comments.

Details of the proposed amendments are contained in a Federal Register notice published on August 22.

Single copies of the NRC's associated "Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement in Support of Radiological Criteria for Decommissioning Nuclear Facilities" (NUREG-1496), a related appendix on natural background radiation (NUREG-1501), and the staff's working draft regulatory guidance (NUREG-1500) may be obtained by written request to: Printing & Mail Services Branch, Office of Administration, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, or Fax: (301) 504-2260.

Interested persons are invited to submit written comments on the proposed changes to the regulations, the draft environmental impact statement and related documents described in the Federal Register notice. The comments should be received by December 20 (120 days after publication of the Federal Register notice). They should be addressed to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.

Comments may also be submitted electronically to the NRC Enhanced Participatory Rulemaking on Radiological Criteria for Decommissioning Electronic Bulletin Board, 800/880-6091. (Users should set parity to none, data bits to 8, and stop bits to 1 (N,8,1); and use ANSI or VT-100 terminal emulation.) Background documents on the rulemaking, including the draft GEIS and working draft regulatory guide, are also available for downloading and viewing on the bulletin board.

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