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NRC CONSIDERS CHANGING FREQUENCY
OF ON-SITE EMERGENCY PLANNING EXERCISES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering changing its regulations governing the frequency of on-site emergency planning exercises at licensed nuclear power plants. The action would partially grant a petition for rulemaking submitted by Virginia Electric & Power Company.

The proposed revisions would reduce the required frequency for full formal exercise of a licensee's on-site emergency plans from once a year to once every two years. To ensure that adequate emergency response capabilities are maintained in the interim, licensees would have to conduct training drills during this period. At least one of the training drills would have to include a combination of some of the principal functional areas of the licensee's on-site emergency response capabilities. The principal functional areas include activities such as management and coordination of emergency response, accident assessment, protective action decisionmaking, and plant system repair and corrective actions.

In contrast to more formal exercises, the training drills would not have to activate all of the licensee's emergency response facilities, supervised instruction would be permitted, the operating staff would have the opportunity to resolve their own problems rather than having drill evaluators intervene, and the drills could focus on on-site training objectives.

The regulations would continue to require licensees to conduct biennial "full participation" exercises that involve states and local governments within the plume exposure pathway emergency planning zone (the area within an approximate 10-mile radius of the plant). The on-site exercise could be included in the biennial full-participation exercise.

In addition, licensees would have to permit any state or local government located within the plume exposure emergency planning zone to participate in the licensee's on-site training drills upon request.

The Commission believes that these changes would not result in any lessening of preparedness or any increase in risk to the public, since licensees would be required to maintain adequate emergency response capabilities and conduct realistic drills between the biennial full participation exercises. The changes could result in the reallocation and more effective use of resources within some licensees' emergency planning programs. It is not clear, however, that these changes would result in significant overall cost savings. The Commission cautions against expectations that the proposed changes would necessarily result in significant reductions in NRC inspection activity related to observation and evaluation of licensees' emergency preparedness activities.

Virginia Electric & Power Company, operator of the Surry and North Anna nuclear power plants, submitted its petition on this subject on December 9, 1993. A notice of filing of the petition was published in the Federal Register for public comment on March 4, 1993, and comments received were considered in developing the proposed rule.

Public comments are now invited on the proposed rule and should be submitted by July 13 (90 days after publication of a Federal Register notice on this subject on April 14). The comments should be addressed to the Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.

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