

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, DC 20555
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234
Internet: opa@nrc.gov

No. 96-08

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Wednesday, January 17, 1996)

NRC EXTENDS CERTAIN MATERIALS LICENSES BY FIVE YEARS
ON A ONE-TIME BASIS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is revising its regulations to extend certain nuclear materials licenses automatically for five years.

The one-time extension will provide time and resources for the NRC to develop a new nuclear materials licensing process that will be faster than the current one, that will use modern information technology, and that will reduce personnel resources needed for the licensing program to meet the agency's projected lower staffing levels. The objective is to maintain or raise the level of public safety achieved by the current licensing process.

The one-time, five-year automatic license extension and the new licensing process under development will not apply to nuclear reactors, uranium milling and processing facilities, or nuclear fuel production facilities.

In addition, those materials licensees that the Commission believes could present a relatively greater potential risk from a health and safety standpoint will not be automatically extended. A Federal Register notice published on January 16 identifies the categories of materials licenses ineligible for the extension.

The Commission estimates that more than 80 percent of its 6,500 materials licenses will be extended under the rule, including, for example, many hospitals that use radioactive materials for patient treatment and diagnosis, universities that use radioactive material in research, and industrial users.

The Commission believes that the one-time extensions may be granted without adverse effect on the public health and safety because:

- Licenses that could present a greater potential health and safety risk will continue to be reviewed and renewed in accordance with existing procedures.

- The extended licenses will provide the same authorizations and impose the same limits on licensee activities as the current ones.
- NRC will continue to inspect licensees with the same frequency as now and, if violations of NRC requirements are found, require corrective actions or issue orders that would modify, suspend or revoke the license.

The extended license will be different from a "renewed" license, which involves an NRC technical review and can include changes in current operations if requested and approved. Materials licenses are currently issued for five years, with an opportunity for renewal for five-year periods, upon licensee application and NRC approval. If a licensee applies for renewal before the license expires, the license remains in effect until the NRC acts.

The new rule will automatically extend eligible licenses with expiration dates after last July 1, provided a timely renewal application has been received. The NRC will refund any renewal fees submitted. The NRC staff will continue to process for renewal, rather than automatic extension, the timely applications received for licenses with expiration dates before July 1.

The NRC issued a proposed rule on this subject on September 8. No substantive changes were made as a result of the comments received.

#