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NRC PROPOSES TO REQUIRE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS TO ASSESS SAFETY  
IMPACT BEFORE TAKING EQUIPMENT OUT OF SERVICE FOR MAINTENANCE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to revise its Maintenance Rule to require that nuclear power plant licensees assess the impact on safety before they take equipment out of service for maintenance. At present, the rule says that licensees "should" do such an assessment, but does not require it.

NRC is taking comments on the proposed rule change. Comments are due December 14.

NRC has long been concerned about a trend in the nuclear power industry to take key equipment out of service for maintenance while a plant is on line, without a thorough risk evaluation. Published NRC reports on 50 inspections conducted since the Maintenance Rule was first adopted in 1991 show that all licensees checked have programs in place requiring a review of the safety impact on the plant before equipment is taken out of service for maintenance. But at five sites, licensees had not performed such assessments, and at 19 others safety assessment weaknesses were found.

The present rulemaking results from a directive given the NRC staff by the Commission after it was informed last year that the Maintenance Rule language on safety assessments is permissive, rather than mandatory. Also at the Commission's direction, the proposed amendment specifies that the Maintenance Rule applies during all conditions of plant operations, including shutdowns, and that safety assessments are to be performed for all maintenance activities.

More details about the proposed rule amendment may be found in a notice published on pages 52201-52206 of the September 30 edition of the Federal Register. Comments should be mailed to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, Attention: Rulemakings and Adjudications Staff. They also may be hand-delivered to 11555 Rockville Pike, Rockville,

MD, between 7:30 a.m. and 4:15 p.m. on Federal workdays.  
Comments may be transmitted via the NRC's interactive rulemaking  
web site through the NRC home page found at <http://www.nrc.gov>.

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