

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

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NRC PROPOSES REVISIONS TO ITS REGULATIONS ON USE OF POTASSIUM IODIDE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to revise a section of its emergency preparedness regulations to include the possible use of potassium iodide as a supplemental protection for the public in case of a severe nuclear power plant accident.

This proposed rule also includes a modification of an earlier Commission statement as to NRC funding of potassium iodide stockpiles.

Potassium iodide, if taken in time, blocks the thyroid gland's uptake of radioactive iodine and thus could help prevent thyroid cancers and others diseases that might otherwise be caused by exposure to airborne radioactive iodine that could be dispersed in a nuclear accident. Nuclear power plant emergency plans already provide for distribution of the drug to emergency workers and certain specialized populations, such as hospital patients.

The proposed rule change would add potassium iodide to the range of protective actions which must be considered in nuclear power plant emergency plans. It would accomplish this by adding this sentence to Part 50.47(b) (10) of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations: "In developing this range of actions, consideration has been given to evacuation, sheltering, and as a supplement to these, the prophylactic use of potassium iodide (KI), as appropriate."

NRC is moving to amend this regulation as the result of a rulemaking petition filed by Peter G. Crane, an NRC staff attorney who acted as a private citizen. The NRC staff also is preparing guidance that will be used to in determining whether stockpiling potassium iodide is a "reasonable and prudent" measure.

The Commission has determined that - notwithstanding its June 1997 statement that "most likely the NRC" would fund the purchase of state stockpiles of KI - the NRC budget, which continues to decrease, offers little margin for the Commission to divert resources to new initiatives. Historically, funding for nuclear power plant emergency response planning has been the responsibility of state and local governments, which usually work with licensees.

The Commission has directed the NRC staff to work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to establish and maintain regional KI stockpiles. The Commission supports the position that the federal government should fund the purchase of KI for federal stockpiles at appropriately located regional centers. The Commission also supports

NRC funding of the initial purchase and resupply of KI to the extent that it cannot be covered by FEMA.

If FEMA decides after working with the states to request funds from Congress for a program of federally funded grants for state KI stockpiles, the Commission said the staff should assist FEMA in developing its funding request.

The proposed rule will be published for public comment in an upcoming edition of the Federal Register. It also will be available on the NRC Homepage at www.nrc.gov/NRC/rule.html.

Comments should be filed within 90 days after publication. They should be sent to: Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555-0001. ATTN: Rulemakings and Adjudications Staff. Comments may also be filed electronically as described in the Federal Register notice.

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