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**NRC DIRECTS EXPEDITED ACTION BY LICENSING BOARD  
CONSIDERING HEARING ON OCONEE LICENSE RENEWAL**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has directed its Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel to adopt an expedited schedule for considering a request for a hearing on the proposed license renewal of the Oconee nuclear power plant 30 miles west of Greenville, S.C.

If a hearing is granted, the Commission has ordered that the Licensing Board set a schedule for conducting it so that a Commission decision can be issued in about two and a half years. This is the second such case-specific order the Commission has issued under its new policy statement on licensing proceedings. The first, issued August 19, concerned a license renewal hearing request for the Calvert Cliffs plant in Maryland.

In its order today, the Commission also has called for the Licensing Board to decide within 90 days whether a petition for hearing on the Oconee license renewal now pending will be granted. It sets milestones that provide for an abbreviated discovery schedule, and for shorter response times for filings and for pleadings than has been the case heretofore. The Licensing Board must notify the Commission in writing if any single milestone could be missed by more than 30 days, explaining why, and outlining measures being taken to get the proceeding back on schedule.

The Commission believes the schedule it has directed is achievable under current NRC rules of practice, the provisions of its order, and the NRC staff's schedule for reviewing the application. At the same time, the Commission order says: "We do not expect the Licensing Board to sacrifice fairness and sound decision-making to expedite any hearing granted on this application."

The milestones set out in today's Commission order are to be followed in ruling on the petition for a hearing already filed in the Oconee case.

Duke Energy Co. filed its application on July 6 for a 20-year extension of the operating licenses for Oconee Units 1, 2 and 3. The application is now under review by the NRC staff.

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EDITORS: The text of the Commission order will be posted on the NRC Internet web page at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/reports/renewal.htm>