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## NRC GRANTS PETITION TO REQUIRE CONSIDERATION OF USE OF POTASSIUM IODIDE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has decided to grant a petition requesting that the agency amend its emergency planning regulations. The change would require that, as each state develops the range of protective actions, consideration be given, as a supplement to evacuation and sheltering, to the use of potassium iodide, as appropriate.

Potassium iodide, if taken in time, blocks the thyroid gland's uptake of radioactive iodine and thus could help prevent thyroid cancers and other diseases that might otherwise be caused by exposure to airborne radioactive iodine that could be dispersed in a nuclear accident.

This action is not taken because of any new insights about risks associated with operating nuclear power plants licensed in the United States, but rather in recognition of the European experience during and following the Chernobyl accident. Some states may find the use of potassium iodide appropriate as a supplemental protective action under certain local conditions.

The petition was filed by Peter G. Crane, an NRC staff attorney who took the action as a private citizen.

The NRC staff will now proceed to develop proposed revisions to its regulations to implement the Commission's decision. In a June 26 memorandum to its staff, the Commission said the explanatory text for the proposed rule changes should include a statement to the effect that state and local decision makers, provided with proper information, may find that the use of potassium iodide as a protective supplement is "reasonable and prudent" for specific local conditions.

To assist state and local decision makers, an NRC staff-developed paper, "Assessment of the Use of Potassium Iodide (KI) as a Public Protective Action During Severe Reactor Accidents," will be issued for public comment and may be submitted to scientific journals for publication. The NRC staff will also issue a brochure containing clear, definitive information to help state and local planners reach an informed decision as to whether potassium iodide is an appropriate protective supplement for them.

The current federal policy on potassium iodide, which was published in 1985, recommends that it be stockpiled and distributed to emergency workers and institutionalized persons during radiological emergencies. It does not recommend requiring pre-distribution or stockpiling for the general public.

In July of last year, the NRC voted to endorse the draft federal policy on potassium iodide being considered by the Federal Radiological Preparedness Coordinating Committee. (The FRPCC is the coordinating body in charge of federal policy on emergency planning around nuclear power plants.) That policy offered to fund the purchase of potassium iodide for states at their request. The Commission noted that the federal government is stockpiling potassium iodide, near major metropolitan areas, for use in mitigating the consequences of potential terrorist use of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.

In its June 26 memorandum, the Commission directed its staff to work with other relevant agencies to ensure that there are established procedures to enable the national stockpile of potassium iodide to be effectively used by states that wish to draw from the national supply in the event of a severe nuclear power plant accident.

This potassium iodide would be available to any state for any type of radiological emergency at any time. If a state wished to have its source of potassium iodide close at hand, the federal government would fund the purchase.

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