

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 SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON WAYS TO DEVELOP NEW NUCLEAR POWER PLANT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is seeking public comment on techniques that might be used in developing a new method to assess licensed nuclear power plants' performance.

Comments are due by Oct. 6. They are being solicited from interested public interest groups, the nuclear industry, state representatives and concerned citizens.

Last September, the NRC began reviewing its nuclear power plant assessment process with the goal of improving the way that job could be done. This review was discussed in a public briefing of the Commission in April, after which the Commissioners directed the staff to seek public comment on some concepts that had been proposed.

Here are the four major issues on which NRC is asking for comments, with some typical areas to be explored in each one:

**REGULATORY OVERSIGHT APPROACH:** The amount of interaction the NRC should have with licensees in order to protect public health and safety, and the types of actions that should be taken in response to various findings; the elements of a risk-informed, baseline-inspection program; allocating additional inspection resources on such factors as safety system availability or the number of operational incidents; the role of licensee self-assessments in an oversight approach.

**INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT PROCESS:** The means for focusing NRC attention on poor performing plants; methods for clearly communicating assessment results to the public and the industry; how often plants are assessed; types of NRC response to various findings.

**RISK-INFORMED ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE:** How information from probabilistic risk assessment and other sources might be incorporated into the oversight process to develop an approach by which plant areas with the highest safety risk get the greatest focus.

**INDICATORS:** Means for measuring safety performance and improving or declining performance trends; linkages between indicators and risk; the possible use of financial data in the assessment process.

More detailed questions about each of these issues are included in a notice published in the Aug. 7 edition of the Federal Register. That notice also contains background information and the Commission's voting record and individual Commissioner comments on the staff's proposed concepts for developing a new nuclear power plant assessment process. The Federal Register notice also will be posted on the Internet at: <http://www.ruleforum.llnl.gov/cgi-bin/rulemake>.

In addition to seeking public comment, the NRC staff tentatively plans to hold one or more public workshops in September to discuss the assessment process. Specific dates, times, locations and agenda will be announced later. Further information may be obtained by telephoning Timothy Frye at 301/415-1287 or David Gamberoni at 301/415-1144.

The NRC staff will use information gathered through this public comment period and the workshops in developing a final proposal to be presented to the Commission by early January 1999.

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