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NRC ASKS UTILITY LICENSEES FOR TESTING,
ANALYSES INFORMATION ON THERMO-LAG MATERIALS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, because of Federal indictments and investigations of Thermal Science, Inc., (TSI), has requested additional testing and analyses information from utility owners who plan to continue to rely on TSI's Thermo-Lag fire barrier materials in their nuclear power plants.

The information from the utilities must address whether those materials and barriers conform to NRC regulations.

In September of this year, TSI of St. Louis, Missouri, and its president, Rubin Feldman, were indicted by a Federal grand jury for the District of Maryland on charges of conspiracy, false statements and Atomic Energy Act violations in connection with selling Thermo-Lag fire barrier material installed in about 70 nuclear power plants.

The NRC's inspector General has informed the staff that TSI may not have implemented measures to correct Thermo-Lag problems involving manufacturing defects such as surface cracks or gaps, even though the company had informed Texas Utilities Electric Company (TU) that it had done so.

In view of the concerns underlying the indictment, the TU experience and industry experience with finding installation defects during destructive fire barrier examinations, the staff has concluded that licensees must not rely on any information and data supplied by the manufacturer for meeting NRC regulations.

The staff also has determined that licensees must not rely on the manufacturer's quality assurance program for assessing the adequacy of the Thermo-Lag fire barrier materials currently installed or that are installed in the future.

In formal letters, the staff has requested that licensees submit written reports within 90 days of the date of receipt describing specific tests and analyses, and methodology, that will be performed to verify that the Thermo-Lag fire barrier materials installed, or that will be installed, represent materials used to address the technical issues associated with

those fire barriers. The licensees are to provide a written supplemental report on the results of the tests and analyses.

In June and August 1992, the staff of the NRC sent Bulletins to all utilities advising them of failed fire tests of Thermo-Lag fire barriers and calling into question the ability of the barrier to meet Commission fire protection requirements. Utility licensees since that time have treated the Thermo-Lag fire barriers installed in their plants as inoperative and have instituted compensatory measures, such as fire watches, which have been determined by the NRC to be acceptable as an interim measure for safe operation of the plants. In December 1992, the staff issued a generic letter to utilities that requested responses to specific NRC concerns.

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