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**NRC SEEKS INFORMATION ON 'YEAR 2000' READINESS OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANT  
COMPUTER SYSTEMS; ASKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON PROPOSED LETTER TO LICENSEES**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff is proposing to send a letter to all licensed utilities with operational nuclear power plants, requiring that they inform the NRC of steps they have taken or will take to assure their computers have no problems adjusting to the year 2000.

But before issuing the letter, NRC is seeking public comment on its technical and regulatory aspects. NRC proposes to require that all nuclear power plant licensees have effectively addressed the problem by July of 1999.

The "Year 2000" problem refers to computers' potential inability to recognize 21st Century dates beginning with January 1, 2000, and beyond. It is caused by computer programs that use two-digit numbers to represent a calendar year (such as "98" for 1998). If the problem is not corrected, vulnerable computer systems will read "00" as 1900, rather than 2000, possibly causing some plant systems or equipment to malfunction.

Thus far, NRC has no information that such computer-related problems exist with safety-related systems in nuclear power plants. But "Year 2000" problems have been found in non-safety, but nevertheless important, computer-based applications such as security computers, control room display systems, inventory control, engineering programs, control systems, radiation monitoring, and emergency response.

The proposed letter to nuclear power plant licensees would require a response, under oath or affirmation, no later than July 1, 1999, confirming that their facility computer systems are suitable for use at least into the year 2000 and that the plant complies with its license and NRC regulations. Also required would be a status report of work remaining to make computer systems fully operational in the new century.

Written comments on the letter should be sent to Chief, Rules and Directives Branch, Division of Administrative Services, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Mail Stop T6-D69, Washington, DC 20555-0001.

They also may be delivered to 11545 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland, between 7:45 a.m. and 4:15 p.m. on Federal workdays.

More details, including the text of the proposed letter, are in a notice to be published shortly in the Federal Register. The notice is also available at the NRC Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, N.W. (Lower Level), Washington, DC.

The notice also will be posted on the NRC Internet web page at <http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/NEWS/year2000.html>. This web page already contains a number of other documents issued earlier relating to the Year 2000 problem, including NRC advisories to the industry published in December 1996 and August 1997, as well as a summary of a meeting NRC staff had with the Nuclear Energy Institute last October.

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