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NRC RENEWS LICENSE FOR GE'S FUEL FABRICATION FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has renewed General Electric Company's license to manufacture nuclear fuel at a plant in Wilmington, North Carolina. The renewed license will extend until June 2007.

GE manufactures nuclear fuel at the Wilmington facility for boiling water reactors in the United States and other countries. The facility began operations in January 1969 under a license from the Atomic Energy Commission. This is the fourth renewal of GE's license for the plant.

The facility converts enriched uranium gas into uranium dioxide powder, which is then pressed into fuel pellets that are about one-half inch long and one-third inch in diameter. The pellets are then loaded into fuel rods to be used in nuclear power reactors. Scrap uranium is recovered and reused in the manufacturing process.

The NRC conducted a comprehensive review of the safety of GE's manufacturing operations, management qualifications and procedures. The agency concluded that the company's proposed continued operation of the Wilmington plant will comply with NRC requirements and will adequately protect the public health and safety. Results of the review are documented in an NRC safety evaluation report. NRC coordinated its review with the state of North Carolina.

The NRC also prepared an environmental assessment of the proposed license renewal and concluded that the renewal will not significantly impact the environment. The agency published this conclusion in the Federal Register for public comments on May 12 and offered an opportunity for a public hearing. No public comments or requests for a hearing were received.

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