



NRC NEWS

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Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, DC 20555-001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>

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NRC REVISES ITS REGULATIONS ON USE OF POTASSIUM IODIDE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is revising a section of its emergency preparedness regulations to require that consideration be given to include potassium iodide (KI) as a protective measure for the general public to supplement sheltering and evacuation in the event of a severe nuclear power plant accident.

Reversing an earlier decision, the Commission has agreed to provide funding for a supply of KI for a State, or, in some cases, local governments designated by the State to request such funding, that choose to incorporate KI for the general public in their emergency plans. After funding the initial purchases of KI, the Commission may consider extending the program to fund stockpile replenishment, but has made no commitments in this regard. The NRC has set aside \$400,000 in fiscal year 2001 for this purpose and will be requesting similar funding in fiscal year 2002.

Potassium iodide, if taken in time, blocks the thyroid gland's uptake of radioactive iodine and thus would help prevent thyroid cancers and other thyroid diseases that might otherwise be caused by exposure to radioactive iodine that could be dispersed in a severe nuclear accident. Nuclear power plant emergency plans already provide for distribution of the drug to emergency workers and certain institutionalized populations, such as hospital patients within designated emergency planning zones.

The rule change would add this sentence to Part 50.47(b) (10) of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations: "In developing this range of actions, consideration has been given to evacuation, sheltering, and as a supplement to these, the prophylactic use of potassium iodide (KI), as appropriate."

NRC is moving to amend this regulation as the result of a petition filed by Peter G. Crane, a retired NRC staff attorney who acted as a private citizen. The amendment should not be taken to imply that the NRC believes that the present generation of nuclear power plants is any less safe than previously thought. On the contrary, present indications are that nuclear power plant safety has been steadily improving. The Commission has found that KI can be a reasonable, prudent and inexpensive supplement to evacuation and sheltering for specific local conditions.

The Commission has directed the NRC staff to work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to find "the most efficient and cost-effective way to fund the stockpiles," for those

States, or in some cases, local governments that elect to stockpile KI for use by the general public as part of their emergency plans. FEMA is the lead agency for drafting a federal policy on use of KI for thyroid protection in a radiological emergency at commercial nuclear power plants. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is the lead agency for the medical aspects of KI prophylaxis.

The rule change, which will be published shortly in the *Federal Register*, will be available on the NRC Homepage at www.nrc.gov/NRC/rule.html.

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