



NRC NEWS

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NRC ISSUES FINAL RULE ON MATERIAL CONTROL AND ACCOUNTING REGULATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is issuing a final rule on its material control and accounting regulations for nuclear power plants, fuel cycle facilities and other licensees that possess 350 grams or more of special nuclear materials (uranium-233, enriched uranium, or plutonium). The amendments are procedural in nature, and of themselves, have no significant impact on public health and safety, the environment, or common defense and security.

The rule is designed to streamline the regulatory process and provide additional flexibility to licensees. It amends the frequency and timing of reporting requirements for certain licensees for submitting material balance and inventory composition reports. The rule does not impact efforts to fulfill the requirements of the safeguards agreement between the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Prior to the rule, most licensees who possessed 350 grams or more of special nuclear material were required to file two reports each year, for the periods ending March 31 and September 30. The final rule requires those licensees to file the report only once a year, within 60 days of conducting a physical inventory.

The rule also broadens the previous exclusion from the requirement to perform an environmental assessment. Currently, no such assessment is needed for the initial approval of safeguard plans; however, the rule does not specifically exclude amendments to those plans. The final rule adds language to clearly state that no environmental assessment is needed before approving an amendment for a safeguards plan to rectify this omission.

In addition, the rule seeks to develop risk-informed safeguards requirements for certain types of facilities licensed to possess and use between one and five kilograms of moderate to highly enriched special nuclear material. Currently, there is only one such facility in this category, General Atomics Inc. of La Jolla, Calif., which is undergoing decommissioning. Previously, some requirements for these facilities were more restrictive than those for facilities licensed to possess larger amounts of highly

enriched nuclear materials. With the new rule, material control and accounting requirements will be more consistent with the safeguards risk posed by the various types of facilities.

A proposed rule on this subject was published in the *Federal Register* last May. The comment period closed the following August, and a total of four comment letters were received from the industry, the Nuclear Energy Institute and a consulting firm.

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