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O-P1-17

UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF NUCLEAR REACTOR REGULATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

July 31, 1998

**NRC INFORMATION NOTICE 98-28: DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMATIC SAMPLE PLAN
FOR OPERATOR LICENSING EXAMINATIONS**

Addressees

All holders of operating licenses for nuclear power plants.

Purpose

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is issuing this information notice to alert addressees to concerns that NRC found while conducting its licensed operator examination program. It is expected that recipients will review the information for applicability to their facilities and consider actions, as appropriate, to avoid similar problems. However, suggestions contained in this information notice are not NRC requirements; therefore, no specific action or written response is required.

Background

Operator and senior operator license applicants are required by Part 55 of Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations (10 CFR Part 55), "Operators' Licenses," to pass a written examination and an operating test that satisfy the basic content requirements specified in the regulation. Although Part 55 does not specify who must prepare, administer, or grade these examinations, the NRC has traditionally performed those tasks itself or through its contract examiners.

On April 18, 1995, the Commission authorized the NRC staff to evaluate possible changes in the operator licensing program that would allow power reactor facility licensees to prepare the initial licensing examinations for their own facilities and directed the NRC staff to carefully consider experience gained from a pilot examination program before fully implementing the changes. On August 15, 1995, the NRC outlined the revised examination process in Generic Letter (GL) 95-06, "Changes in the Operator Licensing Program," and solicited volunteers to participate in a pilot examination program to evaluate and refine the methodology. In a supplement to GL 95-06, the NRC, on January 31, 1997, informed facility licensees of the results of the pilot examinations and the NRC's decision to continue the voluntary pilot program pending the completion of a rulemaking that would require all facility licensees to develop their own license examinations for the NRC's review and approval. The proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* (62 FR 42426) on August 7, 1997.

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Under the revised examination process, the NRC expects facility licensees to prepare the written examinations and the operating tests using the guidance provided by the NRC in NUREG-1021, "Operator Licensing Examination Standards for Power Reactors." The most recent edition of NUREG-1021 is Interim Revision 8, published in January 1997.

NRC examiners are required to (1) review the examinations and tests to determine if they are consistent with NRC standards, (2) direct facility licensees to make whatever changes are necessary to achieve NRC standards if the submitted examinations and tests are found to be deficient, and (3) approve the examinations and tests before they are administered.

Description of Circumstances

Section ES-401, "Preparing Initial Site-Specific Written Examinations," of Interim Revision 8 of NUREG-1021 provides guidance for developing an examination outline, that is, for selecting those knowledges and abilities (K/As) that, upon approval by the NRC, will form the basis for the 100 questions on the site-specific written examination. The K/As (i.e., topics) are selected from NUREG-1122, "Knowledge and Abilities Catalog for Nuclear Power Plant Operators: Pressurized Water Reactors," or NUREG-1123, "Knowledge and Abilities Catalog for Nuclear Power Plant Operators: Boiling Water Reactors." To maintain consistency and objectivity, the NRC expects that topics to be covered in the examination will be selected using a systematic process for each examination, free of any bias or preselection.

The guidance in ES-401 was intended to convey that the topics are to be selected in a systematic, unbiased manner. However, since beginning the voluntary pilot examination program in October 1995, the NRC has identified several instances in which written examination sample plans have not been developed systematically. In one instance, the NRC concluded that the outline for a facility-developed examination was not systematically developed because it was based only on topics having pre-existing test questions and facility learning objectives. Therefore, the examination excluded topics that could have been selected from NUREG-1122 or NUREG-1123. In another situation, the individual sample plan used for developing an NRC examination for one facility was identical to a sample plan of another facility operated by the same licensee. Applicants taking examinations who had prior knowledge about the sample plan duplications may have an unfair advantage over other candidates taking the tests.

The NRC will continue to review facility-developed examinations using the guidance in NUREG-1021. Further, to ensure industry-wide understanding of the NRC's expectations concerning examination development using NUREG-1021, including the concepts of sample plan development, workshops have been and will continue to be held with industry.

This information notice requires no specific action or written response. If you have any questions about the information in this notice, please contact one of the technical contacts listed below or the appropriate Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR) project manager.

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OL = Operating License
CP = Construction Permit

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