

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

July 18, 1997

NRC INFORMATION NOTICE 97-54: NRC LICENSED OPERATORS AT SIX NON-POWER REACTOR FACILITIES ALLOW THEIR OPERATOR LICENSES TO EXPIRE

Addressees

All holders of operating licenses or construction permits for test and research reactors and all licensed operators at test and research reactor facilities.

Purpose

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is issuing this information notice to alert addressees to the importance of ensuring that all persons who operate non-power reactors have a valid, active Reactor Operator (RO) or Senior Reactor Operator (SRO) license. It is expected that recipients will review this 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

Part 50 of Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations (10 CFR Part 50) requires a RO or a SRO licensed pursuant to 10 CFR Part 55 of the regulations to be present at the controls of a reactor facility at all times during operation of the facility. In addition, the Technical Specifications (TS) for some facilities require individuals in specified staff positions to have an active RO or SRO license. The NRC issues licenses for 6 years based on the requirements of 10 CFR Part 55.

Description of Circumstances

In January 1997, The Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) reactor facility in Omaha, Nebraska, requested the NRC to terminate the license of the Reactor Manager who had passed away on January 1, 1997. While checking operator licensing files, the NRC staff discovered that the new Reactor Manager's SRO license had expired on July 2, 1996, and no application for renewal was on file. This meant that no one was licensed to operate the VAMC reactor.

In February 1997, the Reactor Supervisor at the University of New Mexico (U of NM) called the NRC to say that he had forgotten to renew both his and another's SRO licenses.

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On the basis of these incidents, the NRC requested all research and test reactor licensees to check their records to ensure that all personnel operating their reactors were licensed. On the basis of the ensuing phone calls, an additional five operators were found to have allowed their licenses to expire, one each from the University of Illinois (U of I), the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), and the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), and two from General Atomics.

In the cases of VAMC, U of NM, U of I, and General Atomics, the operators had continued to operate the reactor after their individual licenses had expired. The operators at Georgia Tech and WPI did not operate the reactor after license expiration. However, the operator at Georgia Tech held a position requiring a SRO license according to the Technical Specifications.

Discussion

In all cases, the operators affected were unaware that their licenses had expired. Their facility management had certified all to be current in their respective NRC-approved requalification programs, and inspections by the NRC did not reveal any problems with their requalification programs.

In recent years, the NRC twice changed license renewal requirements. The first change increased the life of the license from 2 to 6 years. The second change removed the requirement for the operator to pass an NRC-administered examination as a condition for license renewal. Neither of these changes affected the requirement to submit an application for license renewal.

The licensees of these facilities supplied two major reasons for the lapses. Two of the licensees reported that when license renewal took place every two years, the process for submitting license renewals was tied to the biennial requalification process. When the life of the license was increased to 6 years, the licensee did not adequately implement a new system to cover the change.

Three other licensees cited confusion about the second 10 CFR Part 55 rule change. These facilities believed that when the NRC dropped the requirement to pass an NRC-administered examination, it also dropped the requirement to submit an application for license renewal. In addition, one of these facilities had been shut down for a year thus exacerbating the problem.

All ROs and SROs must comply with the requirements of 10 CFR 55.57 for operator license renewal. All licensees must ensure that all personnel operating reactors have valid active RO or SRO licenses and all administrative and TS requirements for licensed personnel are satisfied.

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

Seymour H. Weiss for
Marylee M. Slosson, Acting Director
Division of Reactor Program Management
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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97-52	Inadvertent Loss of Capability for Emergency Core Cooling System Motors	07/17/97	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors
91-50, Supp. 1	Water Hammer Events Since 1991	07/17/97	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors
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97-50	Contaminated Lead Products	07/10/97	All U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensees
97-49	B&W Once-Through Steam Generator Tube Inspection Findings	07/10/97	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors
97-48	Inadequate or Inappropriate Interim Fire Protection Compensatory Measures	07/09/97	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors

OL = Operating License
 CP = Construction Permit

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 Marylee M. Slosson, Acting Director
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Attachments:

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