



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. 03-166

December 30, 2003

CORRECTED TO REFLECT EFFECTIVE DATE OF FINAL RULE AS OCTOBER 1, 2004.

NRC REVISES SAFETY STANDARDS FOR PACKAGING AND TRANSPORTATION OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a final rule revising safety standards for the packaging and transportation of radioactive material. Most of the changes update U.S. regulations to make them similar to international standards established by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The NRC's current transportation regulations are based, in part, on those developed by the IAEA, a worldwide standard-setting organization. The IAEA periodically revises its transportation standards to reflect scientific and technical advances, and the NRC accordingly updates its own regulations to be compatible with those of the IAEA. The current revision is being coordinated with the Department of Transportation, which is the lead federal agency for transportation regulations in the United States.

Among other things, the final rule would phase out the use of older approved designs for certain transportation packages. This change is being imposed, despite an excellent safety record for the older package designs, in order to bring U.S. transportation regulations into alignment with those in place internationally and to take advantage of safety enhancements in newer designs. Industry will have four years to phase in the use of newer designs.

The final rule also grants a petition for rulemaking to eliminate double-seal requirements for plutonium shipments. There is no comparable IAEA requirement for the use of double seals on packages containing plutonium, and current single-seal packages used for transporting spent fuel would provide adequate accident protection when applied to packages transporting plutonium. The final rule maintains a requirement, however, that shipments of greater than 20 Curies of plutonium must be made with the contents in solid form.

A proposed rule, published in April 2002, sought public comment on 19 open issues, 11 of which were designed for consistency with the IAEA standards. A total of 190 comments were received. The final rule defers a decision on a proposal to allow NRC certificate holders to make limited changes to dual-purpose spent fuel storage and transportation packages and makes other minor

changes to the proposed rule. Public comments and NRC responses will be discussed in a *Federal Register* notice on the final rule, to be published shortly.

The final rule will be effective October 1, 2004.

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