U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

...protecting public health and safety

NRC MISSION AND FUNCTION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission regulates the civilian uses of nuclear materials in the United States to protect public health and safety, the environment and the common defense and security. The mission is accomplished through: licensing of nuclear facilities and the possession, use and disposal of nuclear materials; the development and implementation of requirements governing licensed activities; and inspection and enforcement activities to assure compliance with these requirements.

The NRC was created as an independent agency by the Energy Reorganization Act, signed into law October 11, 1974, which abolished the Atomic Energy Commission. The NRC, which took over the regulatory functions of the AEC, formally came into being on January 19, 1975. The Energy Research and Development Administration, also created by the Energy Reorganization Act, took over the other functions of the AEC and is now part of the Department of Energy.

When he signed the legislation, President Gerald Ford said, in part: "The highly technical nature of our nuclear facilities and the special potential hazards which are involved in the use of nuclear fuels fully warrant the creation of an independent and technically competent regulatory agency to assure adequate protection of public health and safety. NRC will be responsible for the licensing and regulation of the nuclear industry under the provisions of the Atomic Energy Act. This means that NRC will be fully empowered to see to it that reactors using nuclear materials will be properly and safely designed, constructed and operated to guarantee against hazards to the public from leakage or accident. NRC will also exercise strengthened authority to assure that the public is fully safeguarded from hazards arising from the storage, handling and transportation of nuclear materials being used in power reactors, hospitals, research laboratories or any other purpose."

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is headed by five Commissioners appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate for five-year terms. One Commissioner is designated Chairman by the President.

The Commission is headquartered in Rockville, Maryland. Its four regional offices are in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; Lisle, Illinois; and Arlington, Texas.

The NRC has about 3,000 employees and an annual budget of about $625 million to carry out the three basic functions listed below. In addition, the NRC is responsible for licensing the export and import of nuclear facilities, equipment and materials.

Licensing - The agency reviews and issues licenses for the construction and operations of commercial nuclear power plants, research reactors and other nuclear fuel cycle facilities; and it licenses the possession and use of nuclear materials for medical, industrial, educational, research and other purposes. Regulatory authority for nuclear materials licensing has been transferred to 33 states under the NRC's Agreement States Program.

Inspection and Enforcement - The NRC conducts various kinds of inspections and investigations designed to assure that nuclear plant activities are conducted in strict compliance with the terms of the license and the agency's regulations and other requirements, and enforces compliance as necessary.

Under the law, the responsibility for assuring safe operations rests with the licensee, whose performance is monitored by the NRC.

Regulatory Research - The NRC provides independent expertise and information for making timely regulatory judgments, anticipating problems of potential safety significance, and resolving safety issues. It also collects, analyzes and disseminates information about the operational safety of commercial nuclear power reactors and certain nuclear materials activities.

As directed by the Energy Policy Act of 1992, the NRC also regulates gaseous diffusion uranium enrichment facilities which the U.S. Enrichment Corporation leases from the Department of Energy.

FOUR PROGRAM OFFICES CONDUCT MAJOR REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

The first major reorganization of the NRC since it was established in 1975 was implemented in April 1987. The reorganization reflected changes which had taken place over the previous 12 years -- progressively less involvement with the construction of large, complex nuclear facilities and greatly increased involvement with the operation and maintenance of these facilities. Additional changes were made to consider applications to renew existing nuclear power plant operating licenses and review applications to certify advanced nuclear reactor designs.

Four program offices direct the NRC major regulatory functions:

Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation -

The primary responsibilities of this office are to conduct the inspection and licensing activities associated with operating power reactors that are necessary to protect the public health and safety and to establish a sound regulatory framework for the future. It establishes regulations, standards, and guidelines governing reactor licensees. The office also is responsible for: the evaluation of applications to build and operate new power reactors; for extending current operating licenses; for inspection and licensing activities related to the construction and operations of research and test reactors; and for licensing reactor operators. This office also has responsibilities for the effectiveness of emergency preparedness activities for commercial nuclear reactors.

In addition, the office is responsible for conducting inspections of NRC-licensed activities under its jurisdiction to assure that they comply with the NRC regulations and requirements. Important elements of this program, as it applies to the operations of nuclear power plants, include resident inspectors and assessments of licensee performance.

Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards-

This office is responsible for licensing fuel cycle facilities such as uranium mills and fuel fabrication plants; for licensing the possession and academic, medical and commercial uses of radioactive materials; for regulating

the packaging of radioactive materials for transport; for certifying the safety of gaseous diffusion plants, and for regulating nuclear waste storage and disposal. It establishes regulations, standards, and guidelines governing the various uses of nuclear materials and the decommissioning of nuclear facilities.

The office also is responsible for directing the implementation of the agency's responsibilities under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, as amended, which governs the disposal of high-level radioactive wastes; the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act of 1980 and the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Amendments Act of 1985 which govern the disposal of low-level radioactive wastes; and the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978, as amended. In addition, the office is responsible for inspection policy and for conducting inspections of materials licensees to assure compliance with all NRC requirements and regulations.

Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research -

This office has two primary responsibilities: (1) to plan, recommend and implement programs of nuclear regulatory research and resolution of safety issues for nuclear power plants and other facilities regulated by the NRC; and (2) to coordinate research activities within and outside the agency, including participation on national and international committees and conferences.

Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response -

This office develops overall agency policy and provides direction for evaluation and assessment of technical issues involving security at nuclear facilities, and is the agency's safeguards and security interface with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the intelligence and law enforcement communities, the Department of Energy (DOE), and other agencies. It also develops and directs the NRC program for response to incidents, and is the agency incident response interface with the DHS, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other Federal agencies.

OTHER KEY OFFICES

Office of Enforcement - This office develops policies and programs for enforcement of NRC requirements. Enforcement action is used as a deterrent to emphasize the importance of compliance with regulatory requirements and to encourage prompt identification and prompt, comprehensive correction of violations. The office manages major enforcement actions with regard to licensees and assesses the effectiveness and uniformity of enforcement actions taken by the regional offices. Enforcement powers include notices of violations, fines, and orders to modify, suspend or revoke a license.

Two separate offices are responsible for investigations of possible wrongdoing:

Office of Investigations - This office is responsible for the conduct of investigations of licensees, applicants, contractors, or vendors. This responsibility includes investigating all allegations of wrongdoing by individuals or organizations other than NRC employees and NRC contractors. In addition, the office keeps abreast of inquiries and inspections and advises on the need for formal investigations. It also keeps other components of the agency informed of matters under investigation as they affect safety matters.

Office of Inspector General - The Inspector General is a statutory post mandated by the Inspector General Amendments Act of 1988. The office is responsible for conducting independent reviews and appraisals of internal programs and for the conduct of investigations of alleged wrongdoing by NRC employees and its contractors.

Four independent groups that serve the Commission are:

Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards -

This statutory body of scientists and engineers independent of NRC staff, reviews and makes recommendations to the Commission on all applications to build and operate nuclear power reactors, the safety aspects of nuclear facilities and the adequacy of safety standards. This includes uprate license amendments and license renewals.

Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste -

This independent advisory committee provides the Commission with advice and recommendations concerning all aspects of nuclear waste management for which the NRC has responsibility.

Advisory Committee on the Medical Uses of Isotopes -

This committee, composed of qualified physicians and scientists, considers medical questions and, when asked, gives expert opinions to the NRC on the medical uses of radioisotopes.

Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel-

Through the Atomic Energy Act, Congress made it possible for the public to get a full and fair hearing on civilian nuclear matters. Individuals who are directly affected by any licensing action involving a facility producing or utilizing nuclear materials may petition to participate in a hearing before independent judges of the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel.

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