



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC APPROVES TESTING OF FULL-SCALE RAIL CASK FOR TRANSPORTATION OF SPENT FUEL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, preparing for a high-speed crash test of a cask used to ship spent fuel by rail, has set test plans in motion by directing the NRC staff to commence the purchase of a full-scale certified rail cask.

The current computer and scale-model tests provide reasonable scientific assurance NRC-certified casks can survive a transportation accident. NRC Chairman Nils J. Diaz said, "The full-scale cask test will enhance public confidence about how demanding our requirements really are."

The Commission authorized the purchase of an NRC-certified rail cask currently being used, or expected to be used. The Commission also directed its staff to develop a test protocol so that it will not be necessary to conduct additional tests on other certified rail casks, because the tested cask will be representative of those currently in use or expected to be used in the foreseeable future.

The Commission ordered that the test include realistic scenarios (for example, involving a train traveling 75 miles per hour) and include exposing the cask to a fire. Still to be determined are the details of the proposed test and projected costs.

The NRC held four public meetings in March of last year to obtain comments on both the proposed test, known as the "Package Performance Study," and the proposed protocols, discussed in a February 2003 NRC report, "United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission Package Performance Study Test Protocols" (NUREG-1768). The meetings were in Rockville, Maryland; Las Vegas and Pahrump, Nevada; and Rosemont, Illinois.

The NRC establishes design standards for casks used to transport licensed spent fuel, and reviews and certifies cask designs prior to their use. Part 71 of the Commission's regulations contains the cask standards. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act requires the Department of Energy to use casks certified by the NRC if it transports spent fuel and high-level waste to a national high-level waste repository, such as the one proposed by DOE at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

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