



NRC NEWS

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NRC STAFF ISSUES GENERIC LETTER ON NUCLEAR POWER PLANT STEAM GENERATOR INSPECTIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has asked all operators of pressurized-water reactors (PWR) for information on how they conduct inspections of the tubes inside the reactors' steam generators.

Steam generators are the portion of a PWR where water heated by the reactor core travels through thousands of small tubes to transfer heat to a separate water system, creating the steam that drives turbines to generate electricity. Operating experience has shown steam generator tubes can degrade over time, and an NRC review of prior inspections raises the question of whether the inspections have properly examined the tubes.

"Steam generator tubes are an important part of the barrier systems that isolate radioactive contamination from the environment," said Bruce Boger, Director of the Division of Inspection Program Management in the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation. "The responses to this request will allow us to determine whether the plants' inspections are adequately detecting any flaws developing in the tubes."

The request is being made in a Generic Letter, which is one of several methods the NRC has for communicating with the nuclear industry, and has four main objectives:

- 1) Alert addressees that the NRC's interpretation of tube inspection requirements raises questions as to whether all current inspection methods ensure the requirements are met;
- 2) Request a description of current inspections and an assessment of whether they meet current requirements;
- 3) Request that licensees propose plans for coming into compliance if they conclude their plans are not currently in compliance, and;
- 4) Request a tube structural and leakage integrity safety assessment that addresses differences between a plant's practices and the NRC's position.

Licensees have 60 days to respond to the request. A draft letter was published for comment in the *Federal Register* on May 14, 2003, and responses were incorporated into the final document. The NRC's Committee for the Review of Generic Requirements reviewed the Generic Letter in June 2004.

The Generic Letter will be available electronically on the NRC's web site at this address:
<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/gen-comm/gen-letters/> .

(Note to Editors: This issue is entirely unrelated to the recent accident at the Mihama nuclear power plant in western Japan.)

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