



NRC NEWS

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NRC REVISES REGULATIONS FOR STRUCTURES, SYSTEMS AND COMPONENTS FOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has amended its regulations that apply certain controls to nuclear power plant structures, systems and components (SSCs), based on their safety significance. The change goes into effect Dec. 22, 2004.

NRC regulations require nuclear plants to have conservative safety margins, strict procedural controls and multiple safety systems to protect public health and safety. Special regulatory controls -- rigorous design qualifications, record-keeping, maintenance and testing requirements -- are used to ensure that SSCs necessary to safely shut down a nuclear reactor and prevent radioactivity from traveling off-site will function effectively during and after an accident.

These requirements encompass a very broad scope of SSCs -- some of which are very important to safety; others of which, experience and new analytical techniques indicate, provide only a minimal contribution to safety, thereby possibly focusing NRC staff and licensee resources on issues of minor safety significance.

The new regulation can be voluntarily adopted by plant operators as an alternate set of requirements. The changes incorporate up-to-date analytic tools and risk insights to further enhance plant safety by enabling nuclear power plant licensees to more precisely determine the safety significance of SSCs. If licensees adopt the change, some SSCs of "low safety significance" would be subject to less stringent requirements than currently exist, although they must remain capable of performing their safety-related functions. Conversely, some SSCs of greater significance would be subject to new requirements.

"This enables both nuclear power plant licensees and the NRC to more efficiently focus their resources on issues of greater safety significance," said David Matthews, Director of the Division of Regulatory Improvement Programs in the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation.

The NRC received about 200 public comments on the changes during the agency's rulemaking process. Each of the comments was reviewed in detail, and were incorporated as appropriate into the revised regulations. The Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards reviewed the changes in June 2004 and had no objections to their going into effect.

To ensure the new regulations are implemented properly, the NRC staff has developed, for trial use, Regulatory Guide 1.201, "Guidelines for Categorizing Structures, Systems and Components in Nuclear Power Plants According to Their Safety Significance." The current draft of that guide is available on the NRC's Web site at this address:

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/commission/secys/2004/secy2004-0109/attachment5.pdf> .

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