



NRC NEWS

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NRC RELEASES PLAN FOR CONTINUED “MISSION-ESSENTIAL” OPERATIONS DURING AN AVIAN FLU PANDEMIC

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has released its 90-page plan outlining how the agency would maintain mission-essential and supporting functions during a possible flu pandemic that may cause staff absenteeism of 40 percent or more. The plan says the NRC would systematically “shed” lower priority work and take certain action ahead of time to better support staff during a pandemic, including enhanced telecommunications and stocking of hygiene supplies.

The pandemic plan complements the agency’s existing Continuity of Operations Plan and reflects considerations provided by the Department of Homeland Security pandemic planning guidelines.

“This is a plan that we hope we never have to implement,” said NRC Commissioner Jeffrey Merrifield, who is taking a lead role in the review of the planning effort. “But it is prudent to plan ahead and anticipate what actions might be needed and what prioritization of activities must be done in order for the NRC to maintain its essential, core mission of protecting public health and safety.”

The federal government planning assumptions for the pandemic include absenteeism as high as 40 percent for periods of weeks in the course of a 12- to 18-month period. The nuclear power industry is creating its own business continuity planning and site-specific options, and is discussing its efforts and potential needs with the NRC.

Among other items, the plan includes a three-stage implementation process of initiation, execution and reconstitution, and designated lines of succession for agency leadership. Identified “pandemic priority functions” include incident response, threat assessment and dissemination, external communications, critical licensing activities, enforcement and administrative support. Some routine licensing, exercises and inspections may be deferred, delayed or cancelled depending on the availability of staff. However, the NRC will not allow operational safety or security to be jeopardized regardless of the pandemic situation. The plan will be updated annually with new planning assumptions.

The public portion of the pandemic plan will be available on the NRC Web site at:
<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/commission/comm-secy/2006/2006-0033comscy-attachment2.pdf> .

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