



NRC NEWS

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NRC STAFF ISSUES GENERIC LETTER ON INACCESSIBLE OR UNDERGROUND ELECTRIC CABLES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has issued a Generic Letter asking all operators of U.S. nuclear power plants for information on how they inspect or monitor a plant's buried or otherwise inaccessible electrical cables to ensure the plant's safe operation.

A nuclear power plant's electrical cables are primarily found in dry environments and are therefore unlikely to significantly degrade over time. Some plant locations, such as underground vaults or buried conduits, do expose cabling to moisture and other possible degradation conditions. Over the past 18 years, the NRC has identified a small number of cable failures linked to conditions in underground or inaccessible locations. While none of these events affected public health and safety, the NRC requires more information to ensure the issue is being appropriately dealt with.

"We want to make sure the companies operating nuclear power plants know what shape their cables are in," said Patrick Hiland, director of the Division of Engineering in the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation. "There are several methods for checking on buried cables, and replacing potentially faulty cables is something that can be done when a plant shuts down for refueling."

Licensees have 90 days to respond to the Generic Letter's two information requests:

- A detailed history of inaccessible or underground cable failures for all cables that fall under the NRC's "Maintenance Rule;" and,
- A detailed description of inspection, testing and monitoring programs for detecting degradation of cables that support offsite power, emergency diesel generators and other systems covered by the Maintenance Rule.

If licensees choose not to provide the requested information or cannot meet the completion dates, they must submit written responses within 30 days, outlining their proposed course of action.

A draft letter was published for comment in the Federal Register on Aug. 1, 2005, and responses were incorporated into the final document. The NRC's Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards reviewed the Generic Letter in May 2006.

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/> .

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