U.S.NRC

UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Protecting People and the Environment

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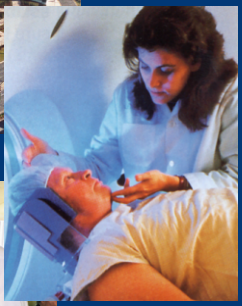

NRC MISSION

It is the NRC's job to protect people and the environment from radiation hazards through regulation of the various commercial and institutional uses of nuclear material, including nuclear power plants in the United States. The mission is accomplished through:

- establishment of standards, regulations and requirements governing licensed activities;
- licensing of nuclear facilities and the possession, use and disposal of nuclear materials; and
- inspection of facilities and users to ensure compliance with these requirements.

The NRC was created as an independent agency by the Energy Reorganization Act, signed into law October 11, 1974, which abolished the Atomic Energy Commission. The NRC, which took over the regulatory functions of the AEC, began operating on January 19, 1975. The Energy Research and Development Administration, also created by the Energy Reorganization Act, took over the other functions of the AEC and is now part of the Department of Energy.

When President Gerald Ford signed the legislation, said, "The highly technical nature of our nuclear facilities and the special potential hazards which are involved in the use of nuclear fuels fully warrant the creation of an independent and technically competent regulatory agency to assure adequate protection of public health and safety. NRC will be responsible for the licensing and regulation of the nuclear industry under the provisions of the Atomic Energy Act. This means that NRC will be fully empowered to see to it that reactors using nuclear materials will be properly and safely designed, constructed and operated to guarantee against hazards to the public from leakage or accident. NRC will also exercise strengthened authority to assure that the public is fully safeguarded from hazards arising from the storage, handling and transportation of nuclear materials being used in power reactors, hospitals, research laboratories or any other purpose."

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is headed by five Commissioners appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate for five-year terms. One Commissioner is designated Chairman by the President.

NRC FUNCTIONS

The NRC is headquartered in Rockville, Maryland. Its four regional offices are in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; Lisle, Illinois; and Arlington, Texas.

The NRC has about 3,500 employees and an annual budget of about $800 million to carry out the three basic functions listed below. In addition, the NRC is responsible for licensing the export and import of nuclear facilities, equipment and materials.

Licensing – The agency reviews and issues licenses for the construction and operation of commercial nuclear power plants, research reactors and other nuclear fuel cycle facilities; and it licenses the possession and use of nuclear materials for medical, industrial, educational, research and other purposes. Regulatory authority for nuclear materials licensing has been transferred to 34 states under the NRC's Agreement States Program.

Inspection and Enforcement – The NRC conducts various kinds of inspections and investigations designed to assure that nuclear plant activities are conducted safely in strict compliance with the terms of the license and the agency's regulations and other requirements, and enforces compliance as necessary.

Regulatory Research – The NRC provides independent expertise and information for making timely regulatory judgments, anticipating problems of potential safety significance, and resolving safety issues. It also collects, analyzes and disseminates information about the operational safety and security of commercial nuclear power reactors and certain nuclear materials activities.

As directed by the Energy Policy Act of 1992, the NRC also regulates gaseous diffusion uranium enrichment facilities which the U.S. Enrichment Corporation leases from the Department of Energy.

KEY REGULATORY OFFICES

The first major reorganization of the NRC since it was established in 1975 was implemented in April 1987. The reorganization reflected changes which had taken place over the previous 12 years -- progressively less involvement with the construction of large, complex nuclear facilities and greatly increased involvement with the operation and maintenance of these facilities. Additional changes were made to consider applications to renew existing nuclear power plant operating licenses and review applications to certify advanced nuclear reactor designs. In 2006, NRC began gearing up for a series of new power plant license applications expected from the industry to start in late 2007.

Six program offices direct the NRC's major regulatory functions:

Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation –

The primary responsibilities of this office are to ensure effective regulation and safe operation of the Nation's current fleet of over 100 commercial nuclear power plants. Key functions are rulemaking, licensing, inspection, assessment and oversight. In addition, this office handles licensing and inspection of research and test reactors, licensing reactor operators, and issuance of power uprates and operating license renewals in support of the agency's mission to protect public health and safety and the environment.

Office of New Reactors –

This office was formally established in January 2007 to prepare for an expected series of applications for new power reactor licenses. It is responsible for the review and issuance of standard reactor design certifications, early site permits, construction permits, operating licenses and combined licenses for commercial nuclear power plants.

Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards –

This office is responsible for overseeing the nuclear fuel cycle from uranium processing through nuclear fuel manufacturing and reprocessing, and spent nuclear fuel storage, transport and disposal. This includes licensing and

inspecting fuel cycle facilities, certifying the safety of gaseous defusion plants, all regulatory aspects of high-level nuclear waste as laid out in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, and policy, regulations and standards for domestic and international safeguards.

Office of Federal and State Materials and Environmental Management Program –

This office was created in October 2006 to oversee the regulation, through licensing and inspection, of the commercial, academic and medical uses of radioactive materials, uranium recovery, the decommissioning of nuclear facilities, and low-level radioactive waste disposal in the United States. It works closely with State and Tribal governments and the public to ensure protection against hazards in the use of radioactive materials.

Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research –

This office has two primary responsibilities: (1) to plan, recommend and implement programs of nuclear regulatory research and resolution of safety issues for nuclear power plants and other facilities regulated by the NRC; and (2) to coordinate research activities within and outside the agency, including participation on national and international committees and conferences.

Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response –

This office develops overall agency policy and provides direction for security at nuclear facilities and is the agency's safeguards, security and response interface with the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the intelligence and law enforcement communities, and the Department of Energy. It also develops and directs the agency's program for response to incidents involving NRC-licensed facilities or users of nuclear material. This office also works with nuclear facility operators to develop and test effective emergency preparedness plans to protect the community should a radiological emergency occur.

OTHER KEY OFFICES

Office of Enforcement – This office develops policies and programs for enforcement of NRC requirements. Enforcement action is used as a deterrent to emphasize the importance of compliance with regulatory requirements and to encourage prompt identification and prompt, comprehensive correction of violations. The office manages major enforcement actions with regard to licensees and assesses the effectiveness and uniformity of enforcement actions taken by NRC regional offices. Enforcement powers include notices of violations, fines, and orders to modify, suspend or revoke a license.

Two separate offices are responsible for investigations of possible wrongdoing:

Office of Investigations – This office is responsible for conducting investigations of licensees, applicants, contractors, and vendors. This includes investigating all allegations of wrongdoing by individuals or organizations other than NRC employees and NRC contractors. In addition, the office keeps abreast of inquiries and inspections and advises on the need for formal investigations. It also keeps other components of the agency informed of matters under investigation as they affect safety matters.

Office of the Inspector General – The Inspector General is a statutory post mandated by the Inspector General Amendments Act of 1988. The office is responsible for conducting independent reviews and appraisals of internal NRC programs and for conducting investigations of alleged wrongdoing by NRC employees and its contractors.

Four independent groups that serve the Commission are:

Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards

This statutory body of scientists and engineers independent of NRC staff, reviews and makes recommendations to the Commission on all applications to build and operate nuclear power reactors, the safety aspects of nuclear facilities and the adequacy of safety standards. This includes uprate license amendments and license renewals.

Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste

This advisory committee provides the Commission with advice and recommendations independent of NRC staff concerning all aspects of nuclear waste management for which the NRC has responsibility.

Advisory Committee on the Medical Uses of Isotopes

This committee, composed of qualified physicians and scientists, considers medical questions and, when asked, gives expert opinions to the NRC on the medical uses of radioactive material.

Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel

Through the Atomic Energy Act, Congress made it possible for the public to get a full and fair hearing on civilian nuclear matters. Individuals who are directly affected by any licensing action involving a facility producing or using nuclear materials may submit a request to participate in a hearing before independent judges of the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel.

For Additional Information Contact:

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