



NRC NEWS

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NRC Adopts Efficiencies in New Reactor License Review Process

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has approved recommendations that could lead to a more efficient review of applications for new reactor licenses while maintaining a paramount focus on safety.

At the request of NRC Chairman Dale E. Klein last fall, Commissioner Jeffrey S. Merrifield agreed to lead a task force to explore options for further efficiencies and other improvements to the NRC's review of new reactor license applications. Initial estimates indicate that it would take approximately 42 months to complete the review of a "combined license" (COL) application – 30 months for technical and environmental reviews and 12 months to complete adjudicatory proceedings that include a mandatory hearing. A combined license is one that essentially combines a construction permit and operating license.

"With the first wave of applications expected to arrive at the NRC this fall, these improvements can speed the review process," said Klein. "Jeff Merrifield (who is leaving the Commission) deserves credit for leading this effort for more expeditious examination of the many applications we anticipate."

The task force made recommendations to improve the processes involved in license reviews, with the potential to conserve resources and speed the reviews by approximately 6 to 15 months. Of those recommendations, the Commission approved the following:

- Conducting the hearing on uncontested matters, referred to as the mandatory hearing, by the Commission itself while retaining the authority to request that the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) Panel conduct that hearing in a particular case. Hearings on contested issues are not affected and would continue to be held by the ASLB.
- Expanding the acceptance review for a COL application from 30 to 60 days to ensure completeness and technical sufficiency before the NRC docket the application and starts the safety and environmental reviews. This would mark the date to begin the review process rather than the date the application is submitted.
- Using Environmental Impact Statements by other governmental agencies for COL reviews where appropriate and applicable.

- Maximizing the use of electronics (e.g., NRC's Web site) to quickly provide information and documents to the public in advance of the publication of bound reports such as safety evaluations.
- Seeking legislative authority from Congress to eliminate the statutory requirement to conduct a mandatory hearing if no one has asked for one.
- Pursuing rulemaking to resolve issues that are generic to COL applications so that resolution is through the public rulemaking process rather than in individual contested proceedings.

In addition, the Commission directed the staff to conduct a public meeting with industry representatives and other interested individuals to discuss the agency's COL review approach and to provide an overview of plans for licensing new reactors before implementation of the approved Task Force recommendations. The Commission also directed the staff to hold a public meeting to discuss ideas on how to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the environmental review process.

The Report of the Combined License Review Task Force and the Commission's Staff Requirements Memorandum on the report's recommendations are available on NRC's Web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/commission/comm-secy/2007>.

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