

Background

The environmental review process is a portion of the combined operating license (COL) review process, and results in the development and issuance of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Currently, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff estimates the environmental review process to take approximately 24 months, which includes four phases:

- 1) Scoping
- 2) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS),
- 3) Comment period, and
- 4) Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

In November 2006, a task force named the Combined License Review Task Force, led by Commissioner Jeffrey S. Merrifield, was formed to explore further efficiencies in the NRC's review of new reactor license applications pursuant to 10 CFR Part 52. As part of the charter, the newly formed task force was to evaluate the NRC's environmental review process associated with new reactors, and provide options and recommendations for improvements to the process while maintaining a focus on safety. The task force reviewed the NRC's environmental review process and solicited process improvement recommendations, lessons learned from the early site permit reviews, and best practices from a variety of stakeholders. The task force issued a report in April 2007 outlining recommendations for improvements to the COL review process. A copy of the report (accession number ML071090128) is available electronically for public inspection in the NRC Public Document Room or from the Publicly Available Records (PARS) component of NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS). ADAMS is accessible from the NRC Web Site at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html> (the Public Electronic Reading Room).

Recommendations for environmental review process improvements included the following:

- 1) Establishing a 45-day public comment period for the scoping process and the DEIS,
- 2) Seeking additional opportunities to use EISs completed by other governmental agencies when appropriate for its COL review activities, and
- 3) Creating an Environmental Review Working Group comprised of senior NRC staff.

The task force also identified an area needing further consideration: the NRC staff should consider how the schedule duration for the environmental scoping phase may be improved for COL applicants that reference an early site permit or a new plant that is co-located with an existing nuclear plant.

In response to the report of the Combined License Review Task Force, the Commission issued a Staff Requirements Memorandum (SRM) in June 2007 (ADAMS Accession No. ML071760109). In the SRM, the Commission took the following positions on the above recommendations:

- 1) Disapproved the establishment of the 45-day public comment period for scoping and the DEIS,
- 2) Approved the NRC staff seeking additional opportunities to use EISs completed by other governmental agencies for COL reviews, to the extent they are appropriate and applicable, and
- 3) Disapproved the creation of an Environmental Review Working Group. Instead, the Commission preferred the augmentation of staff management and oversight of the national lab contractors and requested the staff to conduct a public meeting with industry representatives and other stakeholders to provide an opportunity for them to present their views on how to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the environmental review process.

During the subject meeting, the NRC staff will discuss improvements that have already been made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the environmental review process.