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NRC PUBLISHES STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF LOW-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE REGULATORY PROGRAM

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has published the staff's strategic assessment of the agency's low-level radioactive waste (LLW) regulatory program, proposing several initiatives to meet impending challenges such as decreased disposal capacity and increased production of LLW as new reactors and other nuclear facilities come online.

Those challenges include the anticipated closure to most of the nation in 2008 of the Barnwell, S.C., LLW disposal facility. Barnwell is currently the nation's only commercial disposal option for certain wastes, and its closure could force licensees to store waste on-site until other disposal options become available. In addition, operation of new uranium enrichment facilities, potential nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities and commercial nuclear power plants will create additional demand for LLW disposal capacity.

The strategic assessment concludes that current NRC regulations on disposal of low-level radioactive waste fully protect the health and safety of workers and the public. However, the assessment identifies several measures that could improve the effectiveness of low-level waste management and regulation as disposal needs and circumstances change.

The strategic assessment identifies seven "high-priority" tasks the NRC intends to carry out to strengthen the agency's ability to ensure safe and secure LLW disposal, improve the effectiveness of its regulations, and assure regulatory stability and predictability while allowing flexibility in disposal options. These tasks include updating guidance for extended storage of LLW; developing new guidance for alternative disposal of low-activity waste; and developing guidance for classifying LLW according to the risk it poses to public health and safety.

The strategic assessment was developed with input from the NRC's Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste and Materials as well as external stakeholders such as industry, state agencies, and public interest groups. It is currently before the Commission

as an information paper (SECY-07-0180) and will be available on the NRC's Web site at this address: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/commission/secys/2007/> , or by calling the NRC Office of Public Affairs at (301) 415-8200.

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