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NRC APPROVES FIRST USE OF ADVANCED FIRE PROTECTION STANDARD AT HARRIS NUCLEAR PLANT IN NORTH CAROLINA

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has approved the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant's adoption of the National Fire Protection Association's "Performance-Based Standard for Fire Protection for Light-Water Reactor Electric Generating Plants" (NFPA 805).

"Our approval marks an important milestone in advancing fire protection at nuclear power plants," said NRC Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko. "While current fire protection regulations provide adequate protection, NFPA 805 enhances fire safety using risk insights. The agency has worked with recognized experts to incorporate an updated understanding of fire risks into our regulations through NFPA 805. This process gives nuclear power plant licensees more refined tools to comprehensively evaluate their fire safety measures and focus their resources where they will do the most good."

NFPA 805 describes how existing U.S. reactors can upgrade their fire protection programs by applying risk-informed, performance-based requirements and fundamental fire protection design elements. Under the NFPA 805 standard, reactor owners and operators perform engineering analyses to demonstrate their installed fire protection systems and features will meet specific fire protection and nuclear safety goals, objectives, and performance criteria.

Plant owners must also install additional equipment or take other measures if the analyses call for them. In the case of Shearon Harris, the NFPA 805 analysis led the plant to make several modifications, including installation of an additional fire detection system and an additional diesel generator.

The NFPA issued the standard in 2001, and the NRC provided extensive opportunity for the public and the fire safety community to participate in the agency's examination of the standard. The NRC incorporated the standard in 2004 as a voluntary alternative to existing fire protection regulations. Shearon Harris and the Oconee plant in South Carolina volunteered in 2005 to lead the industry's pilot implementation program. Shearon Harris submitted its formal application to switch to NFPA 805 in May 2008.

An additional 47 reactors at 31 sites, representing 17 utilities, have told the NRC they plan to adopt the NFPA 805 approach. The NRC expects other U.S. nuclear power plants will consider adopting this approach once the industry gains experience in implementing the standard. More information on the NFPA 805 approach and fire protection at U.S. nuclear power plants is available on the NRC web site here: <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/ops-experience/fire-protection.htm>.

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