



# NRC NEWS

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## NRC APPROVES RULE ENHANCING BACKGROUND CHECK REQUIREMENTS FOR STAFF AT RESEARCH REACTORS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has voted to approve a rule formalizing requirements for U.S. research and test reactors (RTR) to perform fingerprint-based background checks on staff with unescorted access to their facilities.

The rule makes permanent requirements of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, first imposed by NRC Orders issued in 2007. The rule will become effective 180 days after its final publication in the *Federal Register*, expected early next year.

Under the rule, RTR licensees must ensure that people who are allowed unescorted access to the facilities, or people who request such access, are fingerprinted and undergo a criminal history check by the FBI. The rule in many ways parallels existing access authorization rules for commercial power reactors, such as allowing facilities to recognize checks done by other RTRs. The rule also makes clear that individuals already holding unescorted access to an RTR retain their clearances and do not immediately require a new background check.

The NRC issued a draft of the rule in July 2010, and accepted public comments through January 2011. The staff will address the public comments in the upcoming *Federal Register* notice. The staff also held a meeting with RTR officials on June 23 to discuss implementation issues regarding the rule.

The NRC currently regulates 31 operating U.S. research and test reactors, which are primarily at universities or colleges. RTRs, which are a small fraction of the size of commercial nuclear power plants, do not produce electricity. They are used for research, training and development in many fields of science, including physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, geology, archeology, and environmental sciences.

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