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NRC Approves Final Rule on Packaging and Transporting Radioactive Materials

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission on April 14 approved a final rule amending the requirements for packaging and transporting radioactive materials. The NRC published proposed changes to the rule for comment in May 2013.

The agency's current transportation regulations are based, in part, on standards developed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an international standard-setting organization. The IAEA periodically revises its transportation standards to reflect acquired knowledge and experience. The NRC is updating its own regulations to be compatible with the IAEA's 2009 transportation standards and the U.S. Department of Transportation's regulations.

The NRC and the DOT share regulatory authority over radioactive materials transport. The DOT is the lead federal agency for regulating hazardous materials transport in the United States and for interacting with the IAEA.

The final rule makes several changes to improve consistency with IAEA standards and revises a fissile material exemption to further reduce the very low chance that uranium with very low enrichment could inadvertently begin a nuclear chain reaction.

The NRC is also changing the requirements for quality assurance programs to provide greater flexibility and extend the duration of the NRC's program approvals. Quality assurance refers to the procedures and actions necessary to provide confidence that a system or component will perform satisfactorily. The quality assurance program changes will make the agency's oversight more efficient and allow its focus to remain on reducing the risk of transportation incidents.

Other changes clarify the requirements for obtaining a general license, the responsibilities of general licensees, and the roles of applicants for a certificate of compliance, certificate holders, and users of certified transport packages.

The final rule will be published shortly in the *Federal Register*.