



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

March 12, 1980

The Honorable Douglas M. Costle
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Mr. Costle:

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has initiated a rulemaking proceeding to reassess its degree of confidence that radioactive wastes produced by nuclear facilities will be safely disposed of, to determine when such disposal will be available, and if disposal or off-site storage is unavailable prior to the expiration of a facility's license, whether wastes can be safely stored on-site until such disposal is available. See enclosed Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

The Commission believes that the views of your agency on the subject matter of this proceeding would of great value. Therefore, I take this opportunity to solicit your comments on:

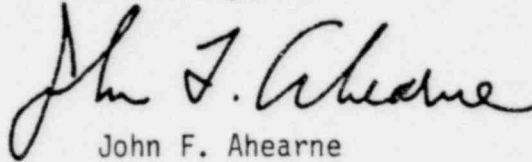
1. the degree of confidence which exists that safe off-site disposal of radioactive waste from licensed facilities will be available;
2. when any such disposal or off-site storage will be available;
3. if disposal or off-site storage will not be available until after the expiration of the licenses of certain nuclear facilities, whether the wastes generated by those facilities can be safely stored on-site until such disposal is available;
4. the conclusions of the Report to the President by the Interagency Review Group on Waste Management, TID-29442 (March 1979); and
5. any other information or views which you believe are necessary to support a reasoned judgment on waste management issues.

Your comments and documents you rely on will be made a part of the record of this proceeding and will be placed in the "data bank" of materials being made available to all participants. It is our intent to make your comments and those of other agencies available early in the proceeding to enable participants to address them in their formal submissions. Consequently, I would appreciate receiving any comments you might wish to make and a copy of relevant documents by April 15, 1980.

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Please note that by providing these comments you are under no obligation to participate further in this proceeding unless you so desire. If you wish to comment upon the issues at future stages of this proceeding or receive future documents in this proceeding, please notify the Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC, 20555, Attention: Docket and Service Branch.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John F. Ahearne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and last name "Ahearne" clearly distinguishable.

John F. Ahearne

Enclosure: Notice of Proposed
Rulemaking

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NUCLEAR REGULATORY
COMMISSION

10 CFR Parts 50 and 51

Storage and Disposal of Nuclear
Waste

AGENCY: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory
Commission.

ACTION: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

SUMMARY: The United States Nuclear
Regulatory Commission is conducting a
generic proceeding to reassess its degree
of confidence that radioactive wastes
produced by nuclear facilities will be

safely disposed of, to determine when any such disposal will be available, and whether such wastes can be safely stored until they are safely disposed of. This rulemaking has been initiated in response to the decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in *State of Minnesota v. NRC*, Nos. 78-1269 and 78-2032 (May 23, 1979), but it also is a continuation of previous proceedings conducted by the Commission in this area. 42 FR 34391 (July 5, 1977).

This notice describes the procedures the Commission will employ to conduct that proceeding and how members of the public can participate. If the Commission finds from this proceeding reasonable assurance that radioactive wastes from nuclear facilities will be safely stored or disposed of off-site prior to the expiration of the license for the facility, it will promulgate a rule providing that the safety and environmental implications of radioactive waste remaining on site after the anticipated expiration of the facility licenses involved need not be considered in individual facility licensing proceedings. In the event the Commission determines that on-site storage after license expiration may be necessary or appropriate, it will issue a proposed rule providing how that question will be addressed.

DATES: Notices of intent to participate must be filed by November 26, 1979. Other deadlines are described below.

ADDRESS: Send comments to the Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch. All filings will be available for public inspection in the Commission's Public Document Room at 1717 H. Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen S. Ostrach, Office of the General Counsel, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555, (202) 634-3224.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On May 23, 1979 the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit remanded two licensing actions to the Commission to consider whether an off-site storage solution for nuclear wastes will be available by the years 2007-09, the expiration dates of the licenses of the Vermont Yankee and Prairie Island nuclear plants to which the Commission had granted permits to increase the on-site waste storage facilities, and, if not, whether that waste can be stored at the

sites past those dates and until an off-site solution is available. In response to the D.C. Circuit's decision the Commission has decided to undertake a generic reconsideration of the radioactive waste question so that it can: (1) reassess its confidence that safe off-site disposal of radioactive waste from licensed facilities will be available; (2) determine when any such disposal or off-site storage will be available; and (3) if disposal or off-site storage will not be available until after the expiration of the licenses of certain nuclear facilities, determine whether the wastes generated by those facilities can be safely stored on-site until such disposal is available. Previously, in connection with a petition for rulemaking filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council the Commission considered the related question of the likelihood that waste disposal will be accomplished safely, and at that time it found reasonable assurance that methods of safe permanent disposal of high-level waste would be available when they were needed. 42 FR 34391, 34393 (July 5, 1977), *pet. for rev. dismissed sub nom. NRDC v. NRC*, 562 F.2d 166 (2nd Cir. 1976). However, in denying the NRDC petition, the Commission announced its intent to reassess this finding periodically. This new proceeding will offer an opportunity for the Commission to reassess its earlier finding, to obtain wider public participation in its decision and also to take account of new data and recent developments in the federal waste management plan, most notably the Report to the President by the Interagency Review Group on Waste Management, TID-29442 (March, 1979) (the "IRG Report").

Purpose of Proceeding

The purpose of this proceeding is solely to assess generically the degree of assurance now available that radioactive waste can be safely disposed of, to determine when such disposal or off-site storage will be available, and to determine whether radioactive wastes can be safely stored on-site past the expiration of existing facility licenses until off-site disposal or storage is available. In addition to information submitted by public participants and government agencies, this proceeding will draw upon the record compiled in the Commission's recently concluded rulemaking on the environmental impacts of the nuclear fuel cycle (44 FR 45362-74 (August 2, 1979)), and the record compiled herein will be available for use in the general fuel cycle rule update discussed in that rulemaking. However, this proceeding is not designed to reach quantitative

conclusions about waste repository impacts or performance. The Commission will consider economic issues in this proceeding in the same fashion such issues were considered in the recent fuel cycle rulemaking: namely, a waste disposal model will not be considered realistically available if it would be prohibitively expensive to build and operate such a proposed facility. *Cf.* 44 FR at 45367.

During this proceeding the safety implications and environmental impacts of radioactive waste storage on-site for the duration of a license will continue to be subjects for adjudication in individual facility licensing proceedings. The Commission has decided, however, that during this proceeding the issues being considered in the rulemaking should not be addressed in individual licensing proceedings. These issues are most appropriately addressed in a generic proceeding of the character here envisaged. Furthermore, the court in the *State of Minnesota* case by remanding this matter to the Commission but not vacating or revoking the facility licenses involved, has supported the Commission's conclusion that licensing practices need not be altered during this proceeding. However, all licensing proceedings now underway will be subject to whatever final determinations are reached in this proceeding.

If the Commission finds reasonable assurance that safe, off-site disposal for radioactive wastes from licensed facilities will be available prior to expiration of the facilities' licenses, it will promulgate a final rule providing that the environmental and safety implications of continued on-site storage after the termination of licenses need not be considered in individual licensing proceedings. In the event the Commission determines that on-site storage after license expiration may be necessary or appropriate, it will issue a proposed rule providing how that question will be addressed.

Procedures

The Commission has chosen to employ hybrid rulemaking procedures for conducting this proceeding. Within thirty days after publication of this notice members of the public may file a notice of intent to participate as a "full participant" in the further stages of the proceeding discussed below. The notice of intent should set forth the person's or group's identity, technical or other qualifications to participate, tentative positions on the issues to be considered, and a discussion of any special matters or concerns sought to be raised. Furthermore, at that time those members of the public who do not wish to be full

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participants but who wish to file comments on the issues addressed in the rulemaking should file their comments.

The individuals or groups who have chosen to participate as full participants shall be supervised by a "presiding officer" to be named by the Commission at a later date. That officer's principal responsibility will be to monitor the early stages of the proceeding for the Commission, and to assist the Commission in conducting the later portions. To those ends he or she will have authority to order consolidation of individuals or groups in the same fashion provided in 10 CFR 2.715a. The presiding officer may take appropriate action to avoid delay, including, if necessary, holding pre-hearing conferences or certifying matters to the Commission.

The Commission's staff will compile a full bibliography on the subjects relevant to the proceeding which will be made available to the public at an early stage of this proceeding. In addition to that bibliography the Commission will maintain a publicly available data bank which will include relevant information on waste storage and disposal. The data bank will include the IRG Report, the background material the IRG collected in preparing the report, the Generic Environmental Impact Statement on Waste Management being prepared by the Department of Energy, and a collection of other principal works that the Commission staff will compile on the subject of radioactive waste storage and disposal. Furthermore, the Commission will solicit the views of a number of federal agencies on the questions involved in this proceeding and on the conclusions of the IRG Report and make the responses of those agencies available in the data bank so that the participants can address them in their papers. The Commission expects that full participants will voluntarily make relevant documents in their possession available to other full participants to the extent practical and will reference and produce on request the documents on which they rely.

The Commission is considering whether additional procedures should be employed. One proposal is to strictly control inter-participant discovery and to provide that requests for interrogatories, depositions or other formal discovery will not be entertained unless the Commission finds compelling justification therefor. If this proposal were adopted, the Commission expects there would be at most only a few exceptional circumstances in which such justification could be

demonstrated. An alternative proposal which is also under consideration would be to apply to this proceeding the discovery procedures set forth in 10 CFR Part 2 and to have any discovery supervised by the presiding officer. Participants or other members of the public who wish to express views on this matter should file those views with their notices of intent or comments which are due November 25, 1979. In particular participants should discuss whether imposition of the discovery provisions of Part 2 or their absence would be likely to alter their willingness to participate in this rulemaking or to affect the quality of their contribution to the record. The presiding officer will then summarize the views expressed and present his or her recommendations to the Commission. The Commission will issue a prompt decision on this matter so that the participants' preparation of their statements will not be adversely affected by uncertainty as to the extent of data that may be available to them.

Approximately 30 days after the notices of intent are filed, the officer will issue a prehearing order resolving all preliminary issues including consolidation. Following the prehearing order the participants will have approximately 60 additional days (the exact time to be set in the prehearing order) to prepare and file their statements of position. The statements will be the participants' principal contribution to the waste confidence proceeding, and participants should focus their preparation on them. The statements should set forth the participants' views on the issues discussed above, and on the underlying assumptions and scenarios, both technical and institutional, upon which those views are based. After the statements are filed, the participants will be given approximately 60 days (to be set by the order) to prepare cross-statements discussing statements filed by other participants. The cross-statements should be limited to material discussed in the statements and should not be used to introduce new material.

After the statements and cross-statements have been received, the Commission with the assistance of the presiding officer will issue a second prehearing order. This order will set out the procedures to be followed for the remainder of the hearing and may provide for further written submissions from the full participants, or for the scheduling of an oral hearing. If the Commission desires oral presentations, the participants may be further consolidated to ensure that the oral

presentations will be efficient and useful. Unless different procedures are set out in the second prehearing order, the hearing will begin with delivery of prepared statements from the representatives, both technical and legal, of the groups into which the participants have been consolidated. These statements should succinctly summarize the participants' views previously set forth in their statements and cross-statements. Participants should ensure that their representatives will be able to address the merits of the legal, technical and institutional issues that have been raised in this proceeding. After the prepared remarks the speakers will be questioned by the members of the Commission. Furthermore, other participants will be given the opportunity to submit written questions to the Commission for it, in its discretion, to ask of participants.

The Commission reserves the option of providing a final stage at which representatives of the participants may be cross-examined by other participants. The Commission will defer deciding whether to permit any cross-examination until after the hearing is over. To obtain cross-examination a participant will be required to identify the issue or issues as to which cross-examination is sought, and the representative or participant involved, and to demonstrate that cross-examination is necessary to prepare a record adequate for a sound decision.

Based on the material received in this proceeding and on any other relevant information properly available to it, the Commission will publish a proposed or final rule in the Federal Register. Any such final rule will be effective thirty days after publication.

Comments, notices of intent to participate and any other documents filed in this proceeding should be filed by serving a copy on the Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C., 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch. All filings will be available for public inspection in the Commission's Public Document Room at 1717 H Street NW., Washington, D.C.

Dated: October 18, 1979.

For the Commission,

Samuel J. Chilk,

Secretary of the Commission.

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