



# UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
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## NRC PLANS NEW RULEMAKING PROCEEDING ON WASTE MANAGEMENT IMPACT FOR REACTOR LICENSING

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said today that, following two recent court decisions, it has directed a thorough new staff analysis--scheduled for completion by about September 30--of the environmental impact of fuel reprocessing and waste management associated with individual nuclear power plants. This is the first step toward a public proceeding to formulate a new rule for assessing such impact.

The Commission action was disclosed in a detailed policy statement explaining how the NRC plans to handle its licensing activities pending resolution of several questions raised by two July 21 decisions of the U. S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. The decisions relate to how the Commission considers the impact of reprocessing and waste disposal in its reactor licensing process. The court held that the present rule governing that consideration must be more fully documented and explained.

The staff analysis, already under way, is intended to provide that documentation and explanation. After completion of the analysis, the Commission will begin a public proceeding this fall to formulate a new rule governing reprocessing and waste disposal considerations in licensing activities.

The policy statement made clear that this analysis and the subsequent development of a rule represent "but one step in national planning" for waste management. The Energy Research and Development Administration plans to issue in draft form next April a comprehensive environmental impact statement on waste management. Other measures under way include the NRC's development of goals, objectives and general environmental criteria for waste management, and the Commission will prepare appropriate environmental impact statements as it continues developing its regulatory framework for waste management.

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Pending completion of the staff analysis, the Commission does not intend to issue any new full-power operating licenses, construction permits, or limited work authorizations. Some types of licensing--such as fuel loading, limited power testing, or construction permit amendments--will not necessarily be affected. For example, as the Commission noted in its policy statement, it believes that authorization for fuel loading and low-power testing is not precluded by the court decisions. Consequently, the NRC staff today is issuing licenses to two utilities for initial loading of nuclear fuel and low power testing not to exceed 1%. The utilities are Baltimore Gas and Electric Company for Unit 2 of the Calvert Cliffs nuclear power station at Lusby, Maryland, and Public Service Electric and Gas for Unit 1 of the Salem nuclear generating station at Salem, New Jersey.

When completed in September, the staff analysis may provide the foundation for additional NRC licensing. It also may provide the basis for an interim rule under which licensing activities could be resumed.

For the next several weeks, the NRC staff and the licensing boards will continue to process applications up to the point of licensing.

With respect to licenses which already have been granted, the Commission said it will determine, after it receives the staff analysis, whether to initiate proceedings for the review of individual licenses.

The licenses of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corporation Plant at Vernon, Vermont, and Consumers Power Company's Midland, Michigan Station were at issue in the Court of Appeals' cases. The Commission said that since it has determined that the reprocessing and waste management issue should be treated generally by rule change rather than on an individual plant-by-plant basis, it will ask a licensing board to decide whether there should be modification or suspension of these licenses pending issuance of a new rule, or a possible interim rule. The licensing board has been asked to balance all factors in making that determination.

(Note to Editors: The policy statement is attached.)

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

[Docket RM-50-3]

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE URANIUM FUEL CYCLE

General Statement of Policy

Two recent decisions by the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit raise significant questions regarding the future course of Commission licensing activities over the coming months. The decisions are Natural Resources Defense Council, et al. v. NRC, Nos. 74-1385 and 74-1586; and Aeschliman, et al. v. NRC, Nos. 73-1776 and 73-1867 (July 21, 1976). The purpose of this policy statement is to indicate how the Commission intends to conduct its licensing activities pending resolution of the several legal questions raised by the decisions. This statement is not intended to resolve, or indicate any resolution of, the question whether the particular licenses before the court in these cases are to be continued, modified, or suspended during the proceedings called for; since the court refused an explicit request to set aside these licenses, the Commission's view is that the court expects it to resolve this question in formal proceedings, in light of the facts and the applicable law. Nor is this statement intended to reflect any position the Commission may take in further litigation in these cases.

As this statement was in the final stages of preparation, the Commission received a proposal for rulemaking from the Natural Resources Defense Council concerning many of the issues discussed herein. Comments on that proposal are solicited in a coordinate Federal Register notice, also published today. Initial consideration of the petition indicates that it varies in several respects from this policy statement. Some of these variations (notably, rules proposed for existing construction permits, LWA's and operating licenses) may reflect differing legal interpretations; however, in general, publication of the present policy statement will not irretrievably commit the Commission or others to a course inconsistent with the proposals made. The Commission believes that the need for immediate guidance to its staff and licensing boards, and to the interested public, requires publication of the present statement. The Commission will carefully consider the suggestions of the NRDC and, indeed, is aware that others should have the opportunity to comment on these proposals and to offer suggestions for implementing the recent court of appeals decisions.

While other questions were decided, the principal impact of the court's opinions on Commission actions arises from holdings on three related points:

1. A rule adopted by the former AEC in 1974 to codify the environmental effects of the uranium fuel cycle for individual light-water nuclear power reactors, 10 CFR 51.20(e), was inadequately supported insofar as it treated the reprocessing of spent fuel and of radioactive wastes;

2. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires analysis of these reprocessing and waste issues, either through rulemaking or in individual licensing proceedings, as a prerequisite to Commission licensing of a nuclear power plant;
3. If the Commission wishes to revise its rule, it must do so by procedures more demanding than the notice-and-comment procedures required for informal rulemaking by the Administrative Procedure Act. (The court divided 2-1 on the question of further procedures, Judge Tamm stating that notice-and-comment procedures would suffice.)

Even though review of one or more of these rulings may be sought, prudent and responsible regulation requires immediate steps to further analyze the reprocessing and waste disposal issues. Accordingly, the Commission's staff has been directed to review the existing literature thoroughly and to produce on an expedited basis a revised and adequately documented environmental survey on the probable contribution to the environmental costs of licensing a nuclear power reactor that is attributable to the reprocessing and waste management stages of the uranium fuel cycle. It is expected that this statement will be ready on or about September 30, 1976.

The Commission intends to reopen the rulemaking proceeding on the Environmental Effects of the Uranium Fuel Cycle, Docket RM-50-3 for the limited purposes of :

1. Supplementing the record on the reprocessing and waste management issues; and
2. Determining whether or not on the basis of the supplemented record, Table S-3 of 10 CFR 51.20(d) should be amended and, if so, in what respect.

The revised environmental survey just described, together with any amendments to Table S-3 that may be proposed as a consequence of that analysis, will be the basis for these reopened proceedings. We understand the court to regard the procedures originally used as capable of fully ventilating the issues involved, permitting a reasoned Commission discussion and producing a valid rule.\* These procedures,

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\*/ The court understood, as do we, that any such rule would be but one step in national planning for radioactive waste management. The Energy Research and Development Administration has undertaken a comprehensive environmental impact statement, now scheduled for issuance in draft form in April, 1977. A variety of other measures, including this agency's development of goals, objectives, and general environmental criteria for waste management, are also under way. As the Commission then proceeds to develop its regulatory framework for waste management, appropriate environmental impact statements will be prepared. Obviously, areas of uncertainty which may be developed by the present study will help to shape these efforts.



which included an oral hearing and questioning of witnesses by the presiding panel, are set forth at 38 Fed. Reg. 50, January 30, 1973. Alternative procedures, modeled on those to be employed by the Commission in its forthcoming GESMO hearings, have been suggested by the Natural Resources Defense Council in the petition for rulemaking referenced above. An election of procedures to be followed will be made in a forthcoming notice of hearing, following the comment period on that petition, which closes August 31, 1976.

While the extended rulemaking is in progress, the Commission and its licensing boards will be called upon to decide whether nuclear reactor licenses can issue, and whether previously granted licenses should be suspended, modified, or set aside.

In view of the court's recent decisions, the Commission has concluded that no new full-power operating license, construction permit or limited work authorization should be issued pending the developments to be described below. This conclusion is based on recognition that the grant of each of those authorizations, permits, or licenses is premised upon the completion of an adequate environmental impact statement, and that under the subject decisions, absent an acceptable substitute for those portions of Table S-3 which the court has found inadequately supported, the basis for a complete environmental impact statement will not be in place.

The Commission recognizes that this conclusion may have significant impacts on the availability and costs of nuclear power facilities. At present, two nuclear power plants are at the stage where an operating license might otherwise have been issued imminently; two plants will reach that stage within the next four months. Additionally, a decision on whether to issue construction permits for five power plants would in all probability have been reached by the end of the year. The number of plants affected by a cessation of licensing grows with time, and there are obvious costs incurred when plants stand idle. Since existing concepts for reprocessing and waste technology do not vary significantly with the design of nuclear power generating facilities, it is extremely unlikely that the revised environmental survey will result in any modification of these facilities. Only the possibility of discontinuing their construction or use is likely to be at issue.



The Commission does not believe that the licensing constraints here announced must necessarily continue until a rulemaking employing oral hearing procedures has been completed, a process which could take fully a year. If the revised environmental survey justifies, notice and comment rulemaking can provide the basis for an interim rule which would be an adequate substitute for Table S-3 pending issuance of the final rule. In addition to the revised environmental survey, the basis for such an interim rule would include an evaluation of the environmental impact of using that interim rule as a basis for licensing until the final rule is in place, and an assessment of the impact of a suspension of further licensing during that time period. The Commission has directed its staff to develop this information by September 30, 1976. Since interim rulemaking would be accomplished through notice and comment procedures only, an interim rule might be promulgated as early as December 1976, providing a basis for licensing at that time.

The Commission also has under consideration the possibility of a future request to the court of appeals for a stay of its mandate, such a request to be explicitly supported by an appraisal of the likely impact of the court's decision and of granting the stay. If granted, a stay so supported might also provide the basis for resumed licensing.

Finally, some Commission licensing actions do not require preparation of an environmental impact statement, depending upon the circumstances. See 10 CFR 51.5(b). In these instances, which may include

authorizations for fuel loading, low-power testing, or amending a construction permit, the Commission's regulations require that an environmental impact appraisal be undertaken in order to determine whether an environmental impact statement must be prepared. 10 CFR 51.5(c). The absence of an effective Table S-3 would not preclude licensing that is not dependent upon an environmental impact statement. Consequently the Commission is instructing its staff and licensing boards that they may continue to take such actions where an environmental impact assessment has been made and has resulted in a determination that no environmental impact statement need be prepared. See 10 CFR 51.5, 51.7.

In all other instances, the staff and the licensing boards shall continue to process applications and hold hearings up to the point of, but not including, licensing. However, in any contested proceeding, reprocessing and waste management issues should be deferred pending completion of the interim rulemaking, unless the evidentiary record on those issues has already been completed and is adequate for decision. The Commission wishes to avoid the needless duplication which proceeding both by rulemaking and in individual contested licensing hearings would entail and the overall delay that would result. Where a proceeding is uncontested, licensing shall nevertheless be deferred until the Commission has published the revised environmental survey, documenting the probable contribution to the environmental costs of licensing a nuclear

power reactor which is attributable to the reprocessing and waste management stages of the uranium fuel cycle. These values may then be used in reaching a NEPA cost/benefit assessment prerequisite to licensing. Similarly, where a license has been issued, but the action has not become final within the Commission because of pending appeal or possible Commission review, final action or review should be deferred pending publication of the environmental survey; other issues, including as appropriate the issue of suspending activity under the license in question, may be resolved in the interim.

With regard to the Vermont Yankee and Midland licenses at issue in the two court of appeals cases, we agree with the view expressed by the Commission's staff that questions of modification or suspension should be resolved in formal proceedings in light of the facts and the applicable law. Since we have decided that reprocessing and waste management issues should be treated generically by rulemaking rather than on a case-by-case basis, the initial question on remand of the Vermont Yankee and Midland orders will be whether the licenses should be continued, modified, or suspended until an interim rule has been made effective. In resolving this question, the Commission intends to assign the matter to licensing boards with instructions to call for briefs from the parties followed by evidentiary hearings if necessary.\*/ The same

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\*/ An evidentiary hearing on other issues will be required in Midland, barring further review. That hearing, however, should not be commenced until the Midland decision has become final.

question would arise on a request for a show cause order seeking the suspension or modification on fuel cycle rule grounds of any other nuclear power plant license.

It is the Commission's understanding that resolution of this question turns on equitable factors well established in prior practice and case law. Such factors include whether it is likely that significant adverse impact will occur until a new interim fuel cycle rule is in place; whether reasonable alternatives will be foreclosed by continued construction or operation; the effect of delay; and the possibility that the cost/benefit balance will be tilted through increased investment. See Coalition for Safe Nuclear Power v. AEC, 463 F.2d 954 (D.C. Cir.1972); San Onofre, Units 2 and 3, 7 AEC 986, 996-97 (June 1974). General public policy concerns, the need for the project, the extent of the NEPA violation, and the timeliness of objections are also among the pertinent considerations. See, e.g., Conservation Society of Southern Vermont Inc. v. Secretary of Transportation, 408 F.2d 927, 933934 (2d Cir. 1974), vacated on other grounds and remanded, 423 U.S. 809 (1975); Greene County Planning Board v. FPC, 455 F.2d 412, 424-425 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 409 U.S. 849 (1972); City of New York v. United States, 337 F. Supp. 150, 163 (E.D.N.Y.) (three-judge court).\*/

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\*/ In its petition for rulemaking, noticed today, the Natural Resources Defense Council suggests that the appropriate course for the interim period concerning facilities which hold effective licenses should be as follows:

Finally, even if no request for suspension or modification of an LWA, CP, or OL is received, the Commission will nevertheless

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\*/ (Footnote continued)

Facilities which received operating licenses before July 21, 1976:

NRC will order suspension of the operating license for any such facilities unless the licensee can establish that:

(1) Continued operation of the plant is essential to maintain a reliable supply of energy to the reliability region of which the plant is a part, taking into account alternative available sources of supply (including purchase power), historical reserve requirements, and available

interconnections for transmitting power;

(2) Continued operation of the facility will provide adequate protection for the public health and safety, taking into account the health and safety problems associated with production, storage, transportation, reprocessing, if any, and management or disposal of all nuclear fuel required for the plant and all nuclear wastes produced by the plant;

(3) Continued operation of the facility will not tend to foreclose, now or in the future, implementation of alternatives to the operation of this facility or to the design, construction or operation of other facilities which may be considered following completion of the review required by 10 CFR Section \_\_; and

(4) Continued operation of the facility will not tend to irretrievably commit resources to the production of nuclear fuel or the storage, reprocessing, if any, management or disposal of any nuclear wastes.

Facilities which received construction permits or LWA's prior to July 21, 1976:

NRC will order suspension of the LWA or the construction permit unless the licensee can establish that:

(1) Continued construction of the plant is essential to maintain a reliable supply of energy to the reliability region of which the plant is a part, taking into account alternative available sources of supply (including purchase power), historical reserve requirements and available interconnections for transmitting power;

determine whether it should sua sponte initiate show cause proceedings based upon information the Commission receives in the revised environmental

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\*/ (Footnote continued)

(2) Continued construction will not tend to foreclose, now or in the future, implementation of alternatives to the design, construction or operation of this or other facilities which alternatives may be considered following completion of the review required by 10 CFR \_\_\_\_; and

(3) Continued construction will not tend to irretrievably commit resources to the facility.


As noted in the text immediately following this note, we believe the appropriate time for NRC consideration of sua sponte, across-the-board initiation of show cause proceedings to be when it has received from its staff its revised and documented assessment of the reprocessing and waste management issues. While the issues of reprocessing and waste management fully warrant serious and timely attention, no information now at hand calls for so drastic a step in the brief period before this analysis will be available. Also, while the individual factors NRDC suggests are among those relevant to be addressed in seeking a show cause order or in any show cause proceeding, the Commission cannot accept the suggestion that these factors are cumulative and must each be satisfied; its own approved prior practice and established judicial precedent permit balancing of these factors to determine where the equities of each particular case lie.

In adopting this approach, one inconsistent with the NRDC petition, the Commission is aware that neither NRDC nor other concerned parties have been formally heard. In commenting on the NRDC petition, any party interested to do so (including NRDC) may file comments addressed to the point.



survey. As noted earlier, this information should be in hand by September 30. The Commission's determination whether or not to reopen all licenses will then be issued.

FOR THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

  
Samuel J. Chalk  
Secretary of the Commission

Dated at Washington, D.C.  
this 13th day of August, 1976.