



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

September 15, 1997

The Honorable James M. Inhofe, Chairman
Subcommittee on Clean Air, Wetlands,
Private Property and Nuclear Safety
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Enclosed for the information of the Subcommittee are copies of a public announcement and a Federal Register notice concerning a proposed amendment to 10 CFR Part 32. This rulemaking is being undertaken in response to a petition for rulemaking PRM-32-4 submitted by mb-microtec, Inc.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is proposing to amend its regulations to permit the distribution of timepieces containing gaseous tritium light sources to be regulated in accordance with the same requirements as timepieces containing tritium paint. If adopted, this proposed amendment would simplify the licensing process, allow the use of a new technology in self-illuminated timepieces and result in significant savings to licensees and the NRC.

Sincerely,

Dennis K. Rathbun, Director
Office of Congressional Affairs

Enclosures:

1. Public Announcement
2. Federal Register Notice

cc: Senator Bob Graham

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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

September 15, 1997

The Honorable Dan Schaefer, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Committee on Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dennis K. Rathbun", is written over a horizontal line.

Dennis K. Rathbun, Director
Office of Congressional Affairs

Enclosures:

1. Public Announcement
2. Federal Register Notice

cc: Representative Ralph Hall

Draft press release, 8/21/97, 2:30 p.m.

NRC CONSIDERS CHANGES TO REGULATIONS ON WATCHES AND CLOCKS CONTAINING RADIOACTIVE TRITIUM

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering amending its regulations to simplify the licensing process for timepieces containing tritium. It would permit timepieces containing gaseous tritium to be licensed under the same regulatory requirements as those containing tritium paint.

The proposed revisions are in response to a petition for rulemaking submitted by mb-microtec, Inc. of North Tonawanda, New York.

Tritium, a self-luminescent radioactive material, is used in watches and clocks to make their hands, numbers or other parts visible in the dark. It may be either in the form of a gas--contained in tiny sealed tubes--or in paint. The planned revisions would not change the level of radiation protection provided to users and wearers of tritium-illuminated timepieces.

Currently timepieces containing tritium paint may be licensed under a section of the regulations that contains specific prototype testing requirements. License applications that meet those tests, and that do not exceed limits on the total amount of tritium permitted per timepiece, can meet NRC licensing requirements. However, some of the tests, such as a bending test designed to show that paint will not crack off, are probably not suitable for gaseous tritium. Therefore applicants for a license to manufacture watches and clocks containing gaseous tritium cannot apply under this section of the regulations and must apply

for an NRC license under a separate section of the regulations that requires submittal of much more detailed information (such as engineering drawings containing the overall dimensions, minimum and maximum dimensions of each model or series, and description of construction materials).

The proposed rule would remove from the regulations the specific requirements for prototype testing but would continue to contain requirements for overall product performance for all timepieces containing tritium. Where appropriate, the NRC staff, as part of its review of license applications, will impose testing requirements for watch hands and dials through license conditions.

The NRC has concluded that the manufacture and initial distribution of products containing gaseous tritium light sources and the release of gaseous tritium in the event of breakage of the glass vial do not result in significant radiation exposures. In fact, these exposures are a small fraction of the average exposure from natural background radiation in the United States. Therefore, by adopting the proposed rule, the cost savings would be maximized without any measurable adverse effect on public health and safety.

Interested persons are invited to submit written comments on the proposed changes to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, Attention: Rulemaking and Adjudications Staff, within 75 days after publication of a Federal Register notice. This notice is expected to be published shortly.

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