



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

August 21, 2020

Vice President, Operations
Entergy Nuclear Operations, Inc.
Palisades Nuclear Plant
27780 Blue Star Memorial Highway
Covert, MI 49043-9530

SUBJECT: PALISADES NUCLEAR PLANT – TEMPORARY EXEMPTION FROM
10 CFR PART 73, APPENDIX B, “GENERAL CRITERIA FOR SECURITY
PERSONNEL,” SECTION VI, REQUIREMENTS FOR FORCE-ON-FORCE
EXERCISE (EPID L-2020-LLE-0126 [COVID-19])

Dear Sir or Madam:

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC or the Commission) has approved a temporary exemption from specific requirements of Title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR), Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, “Nuclear Power Reactor Training and Qualification Plan for Personnel Performing Security Program Duties,” for the Palisades Nuclear Plant (Palisades). This action is in response to the Entergy Nuclear Operations, Inc. (Entergy, the licensee) letter dated August 4, 2020 (Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) Accession No. ML20218A353 (non-public, withheld under 10 CFR 2.390)), that requested a temporary exemption for Palisades from 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, subsection C.3.(l)(1), regarding the annual force-on-force (FOF) exercise.

The requirements in 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, subsection C.3.(l)(1) state:

Each member of each shift who is assigned duties and responsibilities required to implement the safeguards contingency plan and licensee protective strategy participates in at least one (1) tactical response drill on a quarterly basis and one (1) force-on-force exercise on an annual basis. Force-on-force exercises conducted to satisfy the NRC triennial evaluation requirement can be used to satisfy the annual force-on-force requirement for the personnel that participate in the capacity of the security response organization.

The purpose of the quarterly tactical response drills and the annual licensee-conducted FOF exercise is to ensure that the site security force maintains its contingency response readiness. Participation in these drills and exercises also supports the requalification of security force members.

On January 31, 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency (PHE) for the United States. Subsequently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued recommendations (e.g., social distancing, limiting assemblies) to limit the spread of COVID-19.

In its August 4, 2020, application, Entergy stated the following:

- Palisades will continue performing the quarterly tactical response drills/exercises and is not requesting an exemption from this requirement at this time.
- Palisades implemented isolation restrictions for site personnel on March 15, 2020, that are currently in effect until January 4, 2021. These restrictions are needed to ensure personnel are isolated from the COVID-19 virus and remain capable of maintaining plant security.
- This temporary exemption supports the isolation restrictions (e.g., social distancing, group size limitations, self-quarantining) necessary to protect required site personnel in response to the COVID-19 virus.
- Entergy will maintain a list of the names of the individuals who will not meet the requalification requirements for the annual FOF exercises and will include the dates of the last quarterly drill and annual FOF exercise in which the individual participated.
- Entergy will ensure contingency response readiness of security personnel not participating in an annual FOF exercise by conducting one of the following scenario-based evolutions during quarterly tactical response drills:
 - a tabletop exercise,
 - a communications-based exercise,
 - a lessons-learned review of past exercise, or
 - a walkdown of previous exercise route of travel
- Entergy will conduct any missed annual licensee-conducted FOF exercises within 90 days after the PHE ends or by December 31, 2020, whichever occurs first.
- Entergy will begin implementing COVID-19 PHE training requalification controls at Palisades for managing personnel performing Security Program duties upon NRC approval.

This temporary exemption will apply to Palisades security personnel who have previously demonstrated proficiency and are currently qualified in accordance with the requirements of 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI. Entergy stated that given the rigorous nature of the Palisades nuclear security personnel training programs, which consist of regularly scheduled training activities to include weapons training, contingency response drills and exercises, and demonstrated acceptable performance of day-to-day job activities (e.g., detection and assessment, patrols, searches, and defensive operations), it is reasonable to conclude that security personnel will continue to maintain their proficiency even though the requalification periodicity is temporarily exceeded. Entergy requested that the duration of the exemption be in effect for 90 days after the PHE is ended, or until December 31, 2020, whichever occurs first, consistent with the NRC staff's April 20, 2020, letter discussing planned activities related to the requirements for 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, during the PHE (ADAMS Accession No. ML20105A483).

Pursuant to 10 CFR 73.5, "Specific exemptions," the Commission may, upon application of any interested person or upon its own initiative, grant exemptions from the requirements of 10 CFR Part 73 when the exemptions are authorized by law, will not endanger life or property or the common defense and security, and are otherwise in the public interest.

In accordance with 10 CFR 73.5, the Commission may grant an exemption from the regulations in 10 CFR Part 73 that is authorized by law. The NRC staff has reviewed the exemption request and finds that granting the proposed exemption will not result in a violation of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended, or other laws. Therefore, the NRC staff finds that this exemption is authorized by law.

In accordance with 10 CFR 73.5, the Commission may grant an exemption from the regulations in 10 CFR Part 73 when the exemption will not endanger life or property or the common defense and security. This temporary exemption will only apply to Palisades security personnel who are already satisfactorily qualified on the security requirements in 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI. Based on this fact, and its review of the controls Entergy will implement for the duration of the exemption, including continuing to conduct required quarterly tactical response drills and completing any missed annual FOF drills and exercises within the time period in this request, the NRC staff has reasonable assurance that the security force at Palisades will maintain its proficiency and readiness to implement the licensee's protective strategy and adequately protect the site. Therefore, the NRC staff concludes that the proposed exemption would not endanger life or property or the common defense and security.

In accordance with 10 CFR 73.5, the Commission may grant an exemption from the regulations in 10 CFR Part 73 when the exemption is in the public interest. Participation in FOF exercises places site security personnel in close proximity to one another. Such proximity has the potential to increase the likelihood of security personnel being exposed to the COVID-19 virus. The NRC staff finds that the temporary exemption from the requirements in 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, subsection C.3.(I)(1), would facilitate the licensee's efforts to maintain a healthy workforce capable of operating the plant safely and implementing the site's protective strategy by isolating security personnel from potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus. The NRC staff concludes that granting the temporary exemption is in the public interest because it allows the licensee to maintain the required security posture at Palisades, while enabling the facility to continue to provide electrical power to the Nation.

Environmental Considerations

Granting of this exemption request is categorically excluded under 10 CFR 51.22(c)(25), and there are no special circumstances present that would preclude reliance on this exclusion. The NRC staff determined, per 10 CFR 51.22(c)(25)(vi)(E), that the requirements from which the exemption is sought involve education, training, experience, qualification, requalification, or other employment suitability requirements. The NRC staff also determined that granting this exemption request involves no significant hazards consideration because it does not authorize any physical changes to the facility or any of its safety systems, nor does it change any of the assumptions or limits used in the facility licensee's safety analyses or introduce any new failure modes. There is no significant change in the types or significant increase in the amounts of any effluents that may be released offsite because this exemption does not affect any effluent release limits as provided in the facility licensee's technical specifications or by the regulations in 10 CFR Part 20, "Standards for protection against radiation." There is no significant increase in individual or cumulative public or occupational radiation exposure because this exemption does not affect limits on the release of any radioactive material or the limits provided in

10 CFR Part 20 for radiation exposure to workers or members of the public. There is no significant construction impact because this exemption does not involve any changes to a construction permit and no significant increase in the potential for or consequences from radiological accidents because this exemption does not alter any of the assumptions or limits in the facility licensee's safety analysis. In addition, the NRC staff determined that there would be no significant impacts to biota, water resources, historic properties, cultural resources, or socioeconomic conditions in the region. Therefore, pursuant to 10 CFR 51.22(b), no environmental impact statement or environmental assessment need be prepared in connection with the approval of this exemption request.

Conclusions

Accordingly, the NRC has determined that pursuant to 10 CFR 73.5, the exemption is authorized by law, will not endanger life or property or the common defense and security, and is otherwise in the public interest. Therefore, the Commission hereby grants the licensee's request to exempt Palisades from the requirements for the annual FOF exercise in subsection C.3.(l)(1) of 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI. This exemption expires 90 days after the end of the PHE, or December 31, 2020, whichever occurs first.

If you have any questions, please contact the plant project manager, Booma Venkataraman, at 301-415-2934 or Booma.Venkataraman@nrc.gov.

Sincerely,

Craig G. Erlanger, Director
Division of Operating Reactor Licensing
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket No. 50-255

cc: Listserv

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