



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

December 10, 2020

Mr. G. T. Powell  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
STP Nuclear Operating Company  
South Texas Project  
P.O. Box 289  
Wadsworth, TX 77483

SUBJECT: SOUTH TEXAS PROJECT, UNITS 1 AND 2 – EXEMPTION FROM ANNUAL FORCE-ON-FORCE EXERCISE REQUIREMENT OF 10 CFR PART 73, APPENDIX B, “GENERAL CRITERIA FOR SECURITY PERSONNEL,” SUBSECTION VI.C.3.(I)(1) (EPID L-2020-LLE-0205 [COVID-19])

Dear Mr. Powell:

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC, the Commission) has approved the requested exemption from a specific requirement 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 South Texas Project (STP), Units 1 and 2 for calendar year (CY) 2020. This action is in response to STP Nuclear Operating Company (STPNOC, the licensee) application dated November 16, 2020 (Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) Accession No. ML20321A331), that requested an exemption from 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, subsection C.3.(I)(1), regarding the annual force-on-force (FOF) exercises for CY 2020 at STP.

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

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

On January 31, 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared the 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. On June 18, 2020 (ADAMS Accession No. ML20155K679), the NRC granted the licensee’s previous request for temporary exemption from 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, subsection C.3.(I)(1). That

exemption is set to expire on December 31, 2020. As such, the licensee is required to conduct any missed annual licensee-conducted FOF exercises by December 31, 2020.

The licensee's application dated November 16, 2020, stated the following:

- Approval of this exemption will continue to support the isolation protocols necessary to protect essential site personnel. These restrictions are needed to ensure personnel are isolated from the COVID-19 virus and remain capable of maintaining plant security.
- STPNOC has implemented isolation activities such as self-quarantining, group size limitations and social distancing to protect required site personnel in accordance with NEI 06-03, "Pandemic Threat Planning, Preparation, and Response Reference Guide." Ideally, this will limit the spread of the virus among the station staff. This requires STPNOC to request a temporary exemption from annual FOF exercises because these isolation protocols restrict certain activities associated with the conduct of annual FOF exercises. Maintaining a healthy workforce is preferable to having a sick workforce that is unavailable during a pandemic.
- Specifically, STPNOC pandemic plan has impacted the station's ability to perform annual FOF exercises safely due to the following:
  - COVID-19 conditions in Texas and the local communities where station personnel reside are currently trending upward with regard to number of cases per capita.
  - Station and personnel virus mitigating actions have been successful at minimizing virus impact on the safe and reliable operation of the units and have resulted in less than 1 percent of the station population testing positive for COVID-19 to date.
  - COVID-19 mitigation techniques of maintaining social distancing, mask use, minimizing human footprint on site, and limiting close personal contact of employees during the conduct of work activities are essential elements of this mitigating strategy.
- The proposed one-time exemption will apply specifically to security personnel that the temporary approved exemption applied.
- Impacted security personnel continue to maintain proficiency with the knowledge, skills and abilities required to effectively implement the protective strategy to protect the station against the design basis threat as described in 10 CFR 73.1, Purpose and Scope, because STPNOC has continued to conduct the following training requalification requirements of Section VI of Appendix B to Part 73:
  - Quarterly tactical response drills (Tabletop drills, Timeline drills, Limited-scope tactical response drills)
  - Annual firearms familiarization
  - Annual daylight qualification course

- Annual night fire qualification course
  - Annual tactical qualification course
  - On-the-job training
  - Annual physical examination
  - Annual physical fitness test
  - Weapons range activity (4-month periodicity)
  - Annual written exam
- In addition, and in accordance with the approved temporary exemption, STPNOC conducted tabletop exercises and reviewed lessons-learned of past exercises with all impacted security personnel.

This exemption is specific to CY 2020 and STP 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. The licensee stated that given the proposed exemption does not change physical security plans or the defensive strategy; impacted security personnel continue to maintain proficiency with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to effectively implement the protective strategy to protect the station against the design basis threat because STP has continued to conduct other training requalification requirements; and security personnel will continue to be monitored regularly by supervisory personnel and have implemented controls as identified in the temporary exemption granted on June 18, 2020, granting the requested exemption will not endanger or compromise the common defense or security, or safeguarding STP. Additionally, the November 16, 2020, letter identified the site-specific actions listed above that will be implemented at STP to maintain contingency response readiness, consistent with the NRC staff's October 13, 2020, letter (ADAMS Accession No. ML20273A117).

Pursuant to 10 CFR 73.5, "Specific exemptions," the Commission may, upon application by 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 the 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 exemption will only apply to licensee security personnel who are already satisfactorily qualified in accordance with the security requirements outlined in 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI. Based on this fact, and its review of the controls that the licensee will implement for the duration of the exemption, including quarterly tactical response drills, annual firearms familiarization, annual daylight qualification course, annual night fire qualification course, annual tactical qualification course, on-the-job training, annual physical examination, annual physical fitness test, weapons range activity (4-month periodicity), and annual written exam, the NRC staff has reasonable assurance that the security force at STP 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. The NRC staff finds that the exemption from the annual FOF exercise requirement in 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI, subsection C.3.(l)(1), for CY 2020 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 exemption for CY 2020 is in the public interest because it allows the licensee to maintain the required security posture at STP, while enabling the facility to continue to provide electrical power to the Nation.

### **Environmental Considerations**

NRC approval 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 approval of 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 NRC hereby grants the licensee's request to exempt STP from the annual FOF exercise requalification requirement of security personnel in subsection C.3.(l)(1) of 10 CFR Part 73, Appendix B, Section VI. This exemption applies only to those FOF exercises required during CY 2020.

G. Powell

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If you have any questions, please contact the STP project manager, Dennis Galvin, at 301-415-6256 or [Dennis.Galvin@nrc.gov](mailto:Dennis.Galvin@nrc.gov).

Sincerely,

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

Docket Nos. 50-498 and 50-499

cc: Listserv

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**ADAMS Accession No.: ML20330A312**

OFFICE	NRR/DORL/LPL4/PM	NRR/DORL/LPL4/LA	NSIR/DPCP/RSB/BC
NAME	DGalvin	PBlechman (LRonewicz for)	ABowers
DATE	11/30/2020	11/25/2020	11/24/2020
OFFICE	OGC – NLO	NRR/DORL/LPL4/BC	NRR/DORL/D
NAME	JMaltese	JDixon-Herrity	CErlanger
DATE	12/9/2020	12/10/2020	12/10/2020

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