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NRC CONSIDERS CHANGES TO REGULATIONS
FOR ON-SITE STORAGE OF LOW-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering amending its regulations to establish requirements for on-site storage of low-level radioactive waste by licensees after January 1, 1996.

Under the proposed rule, the current regulations would continue to be used for on-site storage of low-level radioactive waste until January 1, 1996. Current rules permit on-site storage if all relevant licensing and regulatory requirements are met.

After January 1, 1996, the proposed regulations would not permit on-site storage of low-level radioactive waste (other than reasonable short-term storage necessary for decay or for collection or consolidation for shipment off-site, in the case where a licensee has access to an operational low-level radioactive waste disposal facility), unless the licensee could document that it has exhausted other reasonable waste management options. The NRC's proposed regulations would require that the licensee attempt to contract, either directly or through the State in which the licensee's facility is located, for the disposal of the waste.

The proposed regulation would make these requirements standard license conditions for reactor, materials, fuel cycle and independent spent fuel storage licenses. Licensees would not be required to make a formal submittal to NRC to show compliance. However, they would have to document steps that show how they have complied with the requirements and make the documentation available to NRC for inspection.

Low-level radioactive waste is a general term for a variety of radioactively contaminated waste generated by nuclear power plants and related industries, hospitals, medical and educational research institutions, private and governmental laboratories and other commercial activities that use radioactive materials as a normal part of their operations.

Low-level radioactive waste is currently disposed of using near-surface land disposal at privately operated facilities located in the States of South Carolina and Washington. However, the commissions that control these sites have established restrictions or conditions on receiving low-level wastes from outside their regions, effective January 1, 1993.

On December 4, 1990, the Commission published a Federal Register notice seeking public comments on issues regarding low-level radioactive waste disposal, including whether to permit temporary storage of the waste after 1996. The proposed rule takes into consideration the comments received.

Interested parties are invited to submit written comments on the proposed changes to Parts 30, 40, 50, 70 and 72 of the Commission's regulations by April 2, 1993 (60 days after publication of a notice in the Federal Register on February 1, 1993). Comments are requested both on the proposed rule and on strategies and options that the Commission might pursue, in addition to this proposed rule, that would encourage states and compacts to move forward with development of low-level radioactive waste disposal facilities.

The comments should be addressed to Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.

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