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NRC PROPOSES RULE ON SHUTDOWN, LOW-POWER OPERATIONS FOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing to amend its regulations to improve the safety of licensed nuclear power plants during shutdown and low-power operations.

The proposed rule is intended to ensure that safety improvements already made by licensees will be applied consistently.

As proposed, the revisions would require that reactor licensees:

1) Plan and control outages in a way that provides reasonable assurance that important reactor safety functions are preserved;

2) Establish controls for operation of specific equipment relied on during shutdown and low-power operation; and

3) Demonstrate that those functions necessary to remove decay heat from the reactor can be maintained during cold shutdown and refueling operations in the event of a fire in any plant area.

For licensees of pressurized water reactors only, the proposed rule also would require installation of new instrumentation for monitoring water level in the reactor coolant system during shutdown, when the system has a reduced amount of coolant.

The proposed requirements are aimed at resolving problems that have been observed over the last several years, such as loss of decay heat removal, loss of alternating current power, loss of reactor coolant, fires, personnel errors, poor procedures, poor planning and lack of training. Discussions with foreign regulatory organizations reinforced NRC shutdown concerns and in 1991 the staff began a comprehensive evaluation of shutdown and low-power issues. The evaluation resulted in a report, NUREG-1449, that formed the technical basis for the staff's proposed requirements.

Public comments on the proposed changes to Part 50 of the Commission's regulations should be received by January 3, 1995. They should be addressed to the Secretary of the Commission, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555-0001, Attention: Docketing and Service Branch.

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