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EO14300 Rulemaking

NRC Finalizes Contested Hearing Rule, Will Resolve Simplest Cases Within Six Months

ROCKVILLE, Md. — The Nuclear Regulatory Commission today finalized a rule that overhauls the process for contested hearings on reactor and other licensing applications. The rule sets firm schedules designed to complete most cases in about a year and the simplest cases in roughly six months. Previous hearings often took years to complete.

The rule creates three hearing tracks — Standard, Focused and Expedited — based on the complexity of the application. It also requires the agency to include a "Standard Hearing Completion Date" in hearing notices, giving applicants and the public a clear expectation for when the NRC intends to complete the proceeding.

The rule also changes when hearings begin. Rather than waiting for NRC staff to finish their technical review, hearings will start as soon as practicable once a contested issue, or "contention," is admitted. That shift is designed to shave months off proceedings that previously ran step by step instead of side-by-side. These changes support the NRC's accelerated timelines for reviewing reactor license applications.

"This rule preserves public participation while making the hearing process more efficient," NRC Chairman Ho K. Nieh said. "This is another example of how the NRC is enabling the safe and secure deployment and expansion of nuclear technologies in America."

The rule does not change the standards applicants must meet to obtain an NRC license or the agency's responsibility to independently evaluate safety and security. Instead, it establishes a more disciplined process for resolving contested issues while the NRC conducts its technical review.

The final rule takes effect 30 days after publication in the Federal Register, expected next week, and will apply to contested hearing opportunities that open on or after that date. It carries out direction from Congress in the 2024 ADVANCE Act and from Executive Order 14300, both aimed at accelerating deployment of advanced nuclear technology while preserving the NRC's safety and security mission.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission was created as an expert, technical agency to protect public health, safety, and security, and regulate the civilian use of nuclear materials, including enabling the deployment of nuclear power for the benefit of society. Among other responsibilities, the agency issues licenses, conducts inspections, initiates and enforces regulations, and plans for incident response. The NRC is collaborating with interagency partners to implement reforms outlined in new Executive Orders and the ADVANCE Act to streamline agency activities and enhance efficiency.