



NRC NEWS

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NRC REVISES REGULATIONS FOR SPECIAL NUCLEAR MATERIAL LICENSEES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is changing its regulations to increase confidence in the safety margins for facilities that possess and process large quantities of certain types of uranium and plutonium. These regulatory requirements and the related regulatory oversight process, represent the NRC's risk-informed performance-based approach to regulation.

The changes require licensees to analyze their operations to identify potential accidents, and take actions to reduce the likelihood and effects of those postulated accidents, depending on their consequences.

The revised regulations reflect several years of effort by the NRC that included review of a draft rule and associated public comments, a petition for rulemaking, a proposed rule with a formal public comment period, several public meetings, and Commission briefings.

Under the new regulations, licensees must develop a plan for performing their safety analysis within six months of the rule's effective date, and the analysis must be completed within four years. Such an analysis should identify:

- plant and external hazards and their potential for causing accidents
- potential accident sequences and their likelihood and consequences
- structures, systems, equipment, components and activities of personnel relied on to prevent or mitigate potential accidents at the facility.

Licensees also must establish a safety program that provides protection against accidents that could result in release of radioactive materials or certain hazardous chemicals in excess of NRC criteria.

The changes were prompted by an NRC review conducted after a fuel fabrication facility had a near criticality incident (an uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction) in May of 1991. As a result of that review, NRC took steps to improve licensee safety programs, event reporting, and regulatory guidance.

Facilities affected by the revised rule are:

CE Nuclear Power LLC - (Hematite, Missouri)
Global Nuclear Fuel - Americas L.L.C. (Wilmington, North Carolina)
Westinghouse Electric Company, a Division of CBS (Columbia, South Carolina)
Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc. (Erwin, Tennessee)
Framatome Cogema Fuels (Lynchburg, Virginia)
BWX Technologies Naval Nuclear Fuel Division (Lynchburg, Virginia)
Siemens Power Corporation (Richland, Washington)

The regulations would also apply to any future mixed oxide fuel fabrication facility that might be built. The Department of Energy has announced its plans to construct such a facility, which would convert surplus weapons-grade plutonium into fuel to power selected commercial nuclear reactors. The Department has contracted with a consortium of Duke Engineering Services, Cogema, and Stone and Webster to build the facility and irradiate the mixed oxide fuel.

The entire text of the revised regulations will be available soon on the NRC's web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/CFR/PART070/index.html>

The revisions will become effective 30 days after publication in the Federal Register, expected shortly.

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