



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC SEEKS EARLY PUBLIC COMMENT ON A PROPOSAL TO PERMIT ENTOMBMENT FOR REACTOR DECOMMISSIONING

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is seeking early public comment in developing changes to its regulations to permit entombment as an option in decommissioning nuclear power plants.

Entombment is a method for decommissioning a nuclear power plant. After all of the nuclear fuel has been removed from the reactor, other radioactively contaminated materials are left in a specially engineered structure designed to isolate them from the environment for more than 60 years. The structure must be appropriately maintained by the licensee until the radioactivity of all of the contaminated materials inside have decayed to a level acceptable for release of the site for unrestricted use.

NRC regulations currently require that all decommissioning activities be completed within 60 years after a nuclear power plant permanently stops operating, unless exemptions are granted on a case-by-case basis. Entombment can reduce worker exposure to radioactivity because less handling is needed for contaminated materials left in place than for materials transported off-site. It also reduces the need for transporting radioactively contaminated materials from a nuclear power plant site to a disposal site.

After studying the technical issues involved, NRC has concluded that entombment may be a viable option for decommissioning a nuclear power plant. Before it prepares a proposed rule, NRC is seeking public comment on several proposed options described in a Federal Register notice to be published shortly.

Three options are being considered. The first would preclude any rulemaking, but would permit entombment through exemption to existing regulations on a case-by-case basis. A second option would add flexibility to existing regulations through rulemaking by amending the 60-year time frame for completion of decommissioning activities and clarifying the use of engineered barriers for reactor entombments. A third option under consideration would include rulemaking to establish criteria and licensing requirements for an entombed facility.

The proposed rule may be examined at the NRC Public Document Room, One White Flint North building, 11555 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland, or on the NRC web site. Interested

persons are invited to submit comments within 75 days after publication of a Federal Register notice, expected shortly. Comments may be sent to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, Attention: Rulemakings and Adjudications Staff. Comments may also be submitted electronically via the NRC's interactive rulemaking web site at: <http://ruleforum.llnl.gov>

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