



NRC NEWS

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NRC TO REVISE MEETING POLICY TO ENHANCE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has decided to revise its meeting policy to encourage and enhance the opportunity for participation by members of the public, as well as their ability to interact with the NRC in a timely manner.

The revised policy, the result of an ongoing initiative by the agency to improve communications with the public, will identify three categories of NRC meetings and outline public participation opportunities for each. It also will enable people to listen and participate by telephone in NRC-sponsored public meetings, when requested and feasible. In public meeting notices and other appropriate documents, the NRC will encourage the public to provide comments or questions in writing as a means of facilitating public participation and staff follow-up.

The first category of NRC meetings under the revised policy involves those typically held with one licensee, vendor, applicant or potential applicant or petitioner to discuss regulatory issues addressing their specific facility, certificate of compliance, license or license application. The intended objective for the public at this type of meeting is to observe NRC's interactions with licensees, and to obtain factual information to assist in understanding regulatory issues. At such meetings the public will be afforded an opportunity to communicate with the NRC before the session is adjourned. A licensee may respond to questions, if it chooses.

For those meetings of substantial length -- those of more than two hours duration-- the policy will encourage providing one or more opportunities for the public to speak with the NRC staff, before the meeting concludes. Examples of meetings in this category could include annual public meetings under the reactor oversight process, regulatory conferences, pre-decisional enforcement conferences, reactor re-start meetings, as well as those held on licensing actions (or applications), renewals and amendments.

The second category of meetings involves those usually held with a group of industry representatives, licensees, vendors or non-governmental organizations. The objective at these meetings is for the NRC to solicit feedback from the groups on issues that could potentially affect more than one licensee. At this type of meeting, the public will be encouraged to discuss regulatory issues with agency

officials at designated points on the agenda. Generally, there will be more opportunities provided for the public to ask questions and offer comments than in the first category of meetings.

The NRC staff will answer questions at these meetings, with those that cannot be answered assigned to a designated staff person for prompt follow-up. Examples of this category of meeting could include task force groups, industry groups, such as the Nuclear Energy Institute or owners' groups, public interest and citizen group discussions that focus on issues that could apply to several facilities, such as plant system aging, license renewal, decommissioning, or spent fuel storage.

The third and final category of meetings consists of those conducted for the general public, representatives of non-government organizations, private citizens or interested parties, or various businesses or industries. These meetings allow the NRC to work directly with members of the public to ensure their issues and concerns are understood and considered. Such meetings provide the most comprehensive participation opportunities for members of the public to comment and ask questions. NRC staffers will be on hand and will be assigned follow up on specific public inquiries. Examples of meetings in this category could include town hall or roundtable discussions, Environmental Impact Statement scoping meetings, workshops, the Regulatory Information Conference, the Nuclear Safety Research Conference, or proposed rulemaking meetings.

A new brochure will describe the public meeting process, levels of participation and follow-up responsibilities by NRC. The brochure will note that meeting summaries will be made publicly available to ensure that public concerns were heard. Further, the brochure will reflect NRC's commitment to consider issues raised at public meetings in its oversight role, or in a particular rulemaking or licensing matter. Feedback forms also will be provided to attendees to identify any planned improvements. Under the revised policy, members of the public may continue to send their concerns in letters to NRC for consideration. The agency's ongoing efforts to enhance public participation will include seeking public comment on the policy after one year of implementation.

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