

Overview of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Program for Regulating Radioactive Sources

Licenses for radioactive materials are issued, and safety and security controls are applied using a graded, risk-informed approach. Certain radioactive materials are exempt from licensing. Exempt quantities of radioactive materials are manufactured in accordance with an NRC or Agreement State (an Agreement State is a State that has signed an agreement with the NRC, as provided by the Atomic Energy Act, allowing the State to regulate the non-Federal use of radioactive material within that State) license. Use of these materials is exempt from licensing due to the extremely small quantity of radioactive material contained (e.g., smoke detectors). General licenses for somewhat larger quantities of radioactive material are authorizations that do not require an application or issuance of a licensing document but, in some cases, do require an annual registration of sources with NRC. These generally licensed devices are designed and manufactured so that even in accident scenarios, there is no unacceptable risk to public health and safety. Specific licenses for even larger quantities of radioactive material are issued in paper form. NRC administers approximately 4,500 specific radioactive materials licenses, and thirty-three Agreement States administer approximately 17,300 radioactive materials licenses.

NRC has considered the full range of radioactive materials within NRC and Agreement State regulatory jurisdiction and has implemented the U.S. Government's position by applying additional controls to, and tracking of, the Category 1 and 2 sources. These sources were identified in the DOE/NRC joint study and in the Code of Conduct since they present the greatest risk for potential use in a RDD. NRC and the Agreement States have issued orders for enhanced security measures and increased controls to licensees with Category 1 and 2 materials. NRC has developed an Interim Inventory to identify the NRC and Agreement State licensees with Category 1 and 2 sources and is developing a National Source Tracking System (NSTS) to more closely monitor these sources. NRC is also considering if any additional actions need to be taken for Category 3 sources.

Import or export of Category 1 and 2 radioactive material requires a specific import or export license from NRC before the sources are transported in or out of the country. Importers and exporters, or shippers, are not required to carry import or export licenses, or licenses for possession of radioactive sources with shipments; however, NRC now receives prior notification of imports of Category 1 and Category 2 radioactive material. NRC's National Source Tracking System (NSTS), now under development, will capture information on all Category 1 and 2 sources, including those being imported or exported.