



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. 00-055

March 29, 2000

NRC TO EXPAND USE OF REVISED REACTOR OVERSIGHT PROCESS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has revised its inspection and assessment programs of commercial nuclear power plants by approving initial implementation of its revised reactor oversight process at all commercial nuclear power plants (with the exception of the D.C. Cook plants, due to their extended shutdown) beginning in April. The NRC expects to make additional refinements to the program during the first year of implementation.

The revised reactor oversight process reflects several important themes for all of NRC's activities - a focus on safety, an effort to improve objectivity, a commitment to stakeholder involvement, and improved transparency of agency activities for both licensees and the general public.

The staff made its recommendation for initial implementation of the expanded program at a March 7 briefing for the Commission that was open to the public. The recommendation was based on the results of a six-month pilot test of the program conducted at 13 nuclear power plants at nine sites from May to November 1999. In the briefing, NRC senior managers said the pilot program demonstrated the fundamental soundness of the revised reactor oversight process. The new program provides an objective, understandable and predictable approach to the oversight of nuclear reactors and uses risk insights to focus NRC and licensee attention on issues most important to safety.

As an adjunct to the pilot effort, the NRC created an independent panel to evaluate the program and consider whether revisions were necessary before it was expanded to include all operating reactors. The panel, which included NRC staff from headquarters and regional offices, together with representatives of the Nuclear Energy Institute, participating nuclear power plant licensees, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the Illinois Department of Nuclear Safety, used 19 criteria to evaluate the results of the pilot program. During that program, NRC held numerous public meetings and workshops around the country to solicit comments from the public as well as industry, state and local government representatives, incorporating suggestions as appropriate.

The Commission has also approved a staff recommendation that the Systematic Assessment of License Performance (SALP) process, which was suspended in late 1998, be officially terminated. The SALP reports, which were issued every 12 to 24 months, will be replaced by a continual assessment

process, to be summarized by an annual end-of-cycle assessment letter to the licensee. In the future, NRC will post quarterly updates of plant performance information and semi-annual updates to each plant's inspection plans at <http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/index.html> on its web site. Additional details on the results of the pilot program are available on NRC's web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/COMMISSION/activities.html> in SECY paper 00-0049. A description of the revised reactor oversight process is available at <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/primer.htm> .

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