

application for proposed amendment to Facility Operating License No. NPF-90 for the Watts Bar Nuclear Plant, located in Rhea County, Tennessee.

The proposed amendment would have provided a temporary change, until the next time the unit entered Mode 3, to the ice condenser inlet door position monitoring system channel check methodology to account for the impact of an annunciator ground on the existing channel check methods.

The Commission had previously issued a Notice of Consideration of Issuance of Amendment published in the **Federal Register** on December 31, 1998 (63 FR 72339). However, by letter dated March 9, 1999, the licensee withdrew the proposed change.

For further details with respect to this action, see the application for amendment dated December 23, 1998, and the licensee's letter dated March 9, 1999, which withdrew the application for this license amendment. The above documents are available for public inspection at the Commission's Public Document room, the Gelman Building, 2120 L Street, NW., Washington, DC and at the local public document room located at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Library, 1001 Broad Street, Chattanooga, TN 37402.

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 16th day of July, 1999.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Robert E. Martin,

Senior Project Manager, Section 2, Project Directorate II, Division of Licensing Project Management, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation.

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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Public Comment on the Pilot Program for the New Regulatory Oversight Program

AGENCY: Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

ACTION: Request for public comment.

SUMMARY: The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is proposing significant revisions to its processes for overseeing the safety performance of commercial nuclear power plants that include integrating the inspection, assessment, and enforcement processes. As part of its proposal, the NRC staff established a new regulatory oversight framework with a set of performance indicators and associated thresholds, developed a new baseline inspection program that supplements and verifies

the performance indicators, and created a continuous assessment process that includes a method for consistently determining the appropriate regulatory actions in response to varying levels of safety performance. The changes are the result of continuing work on concepts as described in SECY-99-007,

"Recommendations for Reactor Oversight" dated January 8, 1999, and SECY-99-007A, "Recommendations for Reactor Oversight Improvements (Follow-Up to SECY-99-007)" dated March 22, 1999. In June 1999, the NRC began a six-month pilot program with two sites participating from each region. The purpose of the pilot program is to exercise the new oversight process, identify problems, develop lessons learned, and make any necessary changes before full implementation at all sites. The NRC is soliciting comments from interested public interest groups, the regulated industry, States, and concerned citizens. The NRC staff will consider comments it receives for further development and refinement of the new oversight process.

DATES: The comment period expires November 30, 1999. Comments received after this date will be considered if it is practical to do so, but the Commission is able to ensure consideration only for comments received on or before this date.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be submitted either electronically or via U.S. mail.

Submit written comments to: Chief, Rules and Directives Branch, Division of Administrative Services, Office of Administration, Mail Stop: T-6 D59, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001. Hand deliver comments to: 11545 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland, between 7:45 a.m. and 4:15 p.m. on Federal workdays. Copies of comments received may be examined at the NRC's Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, NW (Lower Level), Washington, DC.

Comments may be submitted electronically at the "NRC Initiatives 1999" web page at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/COMMISSION/INITIATIVES/1999/COMMENTS/2a_cmt.html

Copies of the Pilot Program Guidelines may be obtained at the following web site: <http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/index.html>

Additional information on the pilot program may be obtained from the NRC's Public Document Room at 2120 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20003-1527, telephone 202-634-3272.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Alan Madison, Mail Stop: O-5 H4, Inspection Program Branch, Office of

Nuclear Reactor Regulation, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, telephone 301-415-1490.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

In September 1997, the NRC began an integrated review of the process used for assessing safety performance by commercial nuclear power plant licensees. The NRC staff presented a conceptual design for a new integrated assessment process to the Commission in Commission paper SECY-98-045, dated March 9, 1998.

In parallel with the staff's work on the integrated review of the assessment processes (IRAP) and the development of other assessment tools, the nuclear power industry independently developed a proposal for a new assessment and regulatory oversight process. This proposal, developed by the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI), took a risk-informed and performance-based approach to the inspection, assessment, and enforcement of licensee activities on the basis of the results of a set of performance indicators.

The staff set out to develop a single set of recommendations for making improvements to the regulatory oversight processes in response to NEI's proposal, the Commission's comments on the IRAP proposal, comments made at a Commission meeting on July 17, 1998, with public and industry stakeholders and the hearing before the Senate on July 31, 1998. The IRAP public comment period (which ended in October 1998), during which the NRC conducted a four day public workshop in the Fall of 1998, was used to facilitate internal and external input into the development of these recommendations.

Following the public workshop, the NRC staff formed three task groups to complete the work begun at the workshop and to develop the recommendations for the integrated oversight processes: A technical framework task group, an inspection task group, and an assessment process task group. The technical framework task group was responsible for completing the assessment framework and for identifying the performance indicators (PIs) and appropriate thresholds that could be used to measure safety performance. The inspection task group was responsible for developing the scope, the depth, and the frequency of a risk-informed baseline inspection program that would be used to supplement and verify the PIs. The assessment process task group developed methods for integrating PI data and inspection data, determining

NRC action on the basis of assessment results, and communicating results to licensees and the public. Other staff activities to improve the enforcement process were coordinated with these three task groups to ensure that changes to the enforcement process were properly evaluated in the framework structure and that changes to the inspection and assessment programs were integrated with the changes to the enforcement program.

The task groups completed their work between October and December 1998, and developed recommendations to be presented to the Commission. On January 20, 1999, the staff briefed the Commission on the staff's proposal as described in SECY-99-007, "Recommendations for Reactor Oversight Improvements."

The follow-up recommendations for an integrated oversight process are presented in SECY-99-007A, "Recommendation for Reactor Oversight Process Improvements (Follow-Up to SECY-99-007)" dated March 22, 1999, and its attachments. This paper includes further information on the development of the Significance Determination Process (SDP) and the revised enforcement policy.

Scope of the Public Comment Period

This public comment period will focus on obtaining industry and public views on the new oversight process as implemented during the Pilot Program and any additional issues that need to be addressed prior to full implementation of the new oversight process. To assist respondents the following questions are included as a guide. Comments should be as specific as possible and the use of examples is encouraged.

1. Does the new oversight process provide adequate assurance that plants are being operated safely?

2. Does the new oversight process enhance public confidence by increasing the predictability, consistency, clarity and objectivity of the NRC's oversight process?

3. Does the new oversight process improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the regulatory process focusing agency resources on those issues with the most safety significance?

4. Does the new oversight process reduce unnecessary regulatory burden on licensees?

5. The new oversight process does not currently provide an overall assessment of performance of an individual safety cornerstone other than a determination that the cornerstone objectives have or have not been met. However, it does identify regulatory actions to be taken

for degraded performance within the safety cornerstones. Is an overall safety cornerstone assessment warranted or appropriate?

6. Licensee findings as well as NRC inspection findings are candidates for being evaluated by the significance determination process. Does this serve to discourage licensees from having an aggressive problem identification process?

7. In the new oversight program, positive inspection observations are not included in NRC inspection reports and the plant issues matrix (PIM) due to a lack of criteria and past inconsistencies and subjectivity in identifying such issues. Previous feedback on this issue indicated that the vast majority of commenters believed positive inspection findings should not be factored into the assessment process. Does the available public information associated with the revised reactor oversight process, including the NRC's web page which includes information on performance indicators and inspection findings, provide an appropriately balanced view of licensee performance? If not, should positive inspection findings be captured and incorporated into a process to reach an overall inspection indicator for each cornerstone?

8. The staff has established several mechanisms such as public meetings held in the vicinity of the plants, this **Federal Register** Notice, and the NRC's website to solicit public feedback on the Pilot Program. Are there any other appropriate means by which the agency could solicit stakeholder feedback, in a structured and consistent manner, on the Pilot Program?

9. Are there any additional issues that the agency needs to address prior to full implementation of the new oversight process at all sites?

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 19th day of July 1999.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

William M. Dean,

Chief, Inspection Program Branch, Division of Inspection Program Management, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation.

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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards Subcommittee Meeting on Severe Accident Management; Notice of Meeting

The ACRS Subcommittee on Severe Accident Management will hold a

meeting on August 9-10, 1999, Room T-2B3, 11545 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland.

The agenda for the subject meeting shall be as follows:

Monday, August 9, 1999—8:30 a.m.

until the conclusion of business

Tuesday, August 10, 1999—8:30 a.m.

until the conclusion of business

The Subcommittee will review: (1)

The proposed final revision of the Source Term Rule and draft versions of the associated regulatory guide and Standard Review Plan Section; (2) the proposed revision to Regulatory Guide 1.78, "Assumptions for Evaluating the Habitability of a Nuclear Power Plant Control Room During a Postulated Hazardous Chemical Release"; and (3) the status of issues associated with the Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research Severe Accident Research Program. The purpose of this meeting is to gather information, analyze relevant issues and facts, and to formulate proposed positions and actions, as appropriate, for deliberation by the full Committee.

Oral statements may be presented by members of the public with the concurrence of the Subcommittee Chairman. Written statements will be accepted and made available to the Committee. Electronic recordings will be permitted only during those portions of the meeting that are open to the public, and questions may be asked only by members of the Subcommittee, its consultants, and staff. Persons desiring to make oral statements should notify the cognizant ACRS staff engineer named below five days prior to the meeting, if possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

During the initial portion of the meeting, the Subcommittee, along with any of its consultants who may be present, may exchange preliminary views regarding matters to be considered during the balance of the meeting.

The Subcommittee will then hear presentations by and hold discussions with representatives of the NRC staff, and other interested persons regarding this review. Further information regarding topics to be discussed, whether the meeting has been canceled or rescheduled, the scheduling of sessions which are open to the public, and the Chairman's ruling on requests for the opportunity to present oral statements and the time allotted therefor, can be obtained by contacting the cognizant ACRS staff engineer, Mr. Paul A. Boehnert (telephone 301/415-8065) between 7:30 a.m. and 4:15 p.m. (EDT). Persons planning to attend this meeting are urged to contact the above