

Opportunities for Public Involvement

Public involvement in NRC activities is very important for effective regulation. The NRC is interested in the public's views on the safe regulation of a repository and provides opportunities for citizens to make their opinions known. The NRC seeks public involvement throughout the regulatory process so that the safety concerns of all affected people can be promptly addressed. Additional information on public involvement is available in a pamphlet entitled "Public Involvement in the Nuclear Regulatory Process," NUREG/BR-0215, which is available from the Government Printing Office and the NRC Office of Public Affairs.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

The public can keep informed of NRC regulatory activities through a variety of public meetings. These include technical meetings with DOE and meetings with trade organizations and public interest groups. When the NRC staff meets with DOE to discuss safety matters, the meetings are generally open for public observation. When NRC staff meetings address issues of local interest, the meetings are generally held near the proposed facility to make it easier for the public to participate. For example, the NRC staff may hold public meetings in Nevada, near Yucca Mountain, to explain the NRC's role as it relates to the DOE's planned activities and to answer questions posed by Nevada citizens.

Staff meetings are announced at least 10 calendar days in advance. In addition, the NRC announces major meetings in press releases issued to the news media and mailed to more than 1,000 addressees. Notices for Commission, Advisory Committee, and many staff meetings are published in the Federal Register, are available on the NRC web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/PUBLIC/meet.html>, and are available by telephone: NRC meetings: 1-800-952-9674; NRC/DOE technical meetings: 1-800-841-0266.

NRC ON-SITE REPRESENTATIVES OFFICE

The NRC maintains a local on-site representatives office, with a small staff, in Las Vegas, Nevada, as a means of observing the DOE's site characterization activities at Yucca Mountain. If the DOE program advances, the NRC may examine the need to expand the scope of activities conducted out of the on-site representatives office. If the DOE requests, and is granted a license to construct a repository, NRC will locate two or more resident inspectors at the Yucca Mountain site. The public is encouraged to contact NRC staff at U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, On-site Representatives Office, 1551 Hillshire Drive, Suite A, Las Vegas, Nevada, 89137-1048, Telephone: 1-702-794-5046.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

At any time, a member of the public can request information in writing or identify concerns about nuclear facilities through regular correspondence. Routine correspondence between NRC and the DOE is made available in the Public Document Room. General correspondence should be addressed to the Office of the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555-0001.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

The NRC releases information to the public related to its health and safety mission by placing documents in the Public Document Room and on the NRC web site. However, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), members of the public may request copies of other NRC documents and, unless these records fall under specific Federal exemptions, the NRC will provide access to them, generally within 20 working days after the request is received. Under certain circumstances, fees are charged to cover the cost of locating and copying the requested material. Freedom of information inquiries may be addressed to the Chief, Freedom of Information/Local Public Document Room Branch, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555-0001.

RULEMAKINGS

Developing regulations is called "rulemaking." All rulemakings provide the public with at least one opportunity for comment. When a proposed rule is developed, it is published in the Federal Register for public comment. The NRC published proposed regulations for Yucca Mountain at 10 CFR Part 63 in February 1999. Public comments received during 1999 are being factored into the development of the final rule, which, like the proposed rule, will be published in the Federal Register. When the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issues final standards for Yucca Mountain, NRC will amend its 10 CFR Part 63 regulations, as necessary, to conform to the final EPA standards.

YUCCA MOUNTAIN REVIEW PLAN

The NRC staff will invite public comment on its draft plan for reviewing an application for a geologic repository at Yucca Mountain. This plan will guide the NRC staff's safety review of a potential license application and will implement the NRC's regulations in 10 CFR Part 63 for reviewing key technical issues, as they relate to repository safety.

LICENSING DECISIONS

Through the Atomic Energy Act, Congress made it possible for the public to get a full and fair hearing on civilian nuclear matters. The decision whether to license the DOE to construct and operate a repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, will, therefore, be deliberated in a public proceeding. The public may participate in the licensing proceeding by submitting written comments, by making oral presentations before a panel of independent judges or the Commissioners, and, in some cases, by becoming a party or "intervenor" to the proceeding. Parties to NRC licensing proceedings may appeal Commission decisions to the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals and, subsequently, in some cases, to the Supreme Court of the United States.

PETITIONS

If the DOE requests, and if it is granted a license to construct and operate a repository at Yucca Mountain, an individual member of the public or citizen's group could raise health and safety issues in a petition to the NRC to take specific enforcement action regarding the repository. If warranted, the NRC could take action to modify, suspend, or revoke DOE's license or could take other appropriate enforcement action to resolve a problem identified by a petition. Additional information on petitions is available in a pamphlet entitled "Public Petition Process," NUREG/BR-0200, which is available from the Government Printing Office and NRC Office of Public Affairs.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Members of the public may voice their concerns if they believe that safety rules are not being followed at facilities near where they live. The NRC has established a formal process for reviewing and resolving these concerns that would apply to the DOE if it were to request a license from the NRC. Additional information on reporting safety concerns is available in a pamphlet entitled "Reporting Safety Concerns to NRC," NUREG/BR-0240, from the NRC Office of Public Affairs.

ENFORCEMENT

The NRC enforcement program protects public health and safety by ensuring that licensees comply with regulations and license conditions. Enforcement actions might take the form of notices of violations, civil penalties, or orders to modify, suspend, or revoke licenses. Enforcement conferences are often held with a licensee, a vendor, or other person before the NRC makes its final decision on a significant enforcement action. In most cases, these conferences are open to public observation. This process will apply if the DOE becomes an NRC licensee.



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on public involvement, contact the NRC Office of Public Affairs by telephone at 301-415-8200, via email at OPA@NRC.GOV, on the Internet at <http://www.nrc.gov>, or by U.S. Mail at U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555-0001. Or, order a copy of the "Citizen's Guide to U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Information," NUREG/BR-0010, by writing the Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 37082, Washington, D.C. 20013-7082, or calling 202-512-2249.

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