



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC ISSUES GENERIC LETTER CONCERNING POTENTIAL REACTOR CONTAINMENT SUMP ISSUE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has asked all operators of pressurized-water reactors (PWR) for information related to containment sumps, a component of a safety-related water recirculation system in nuclear power plants.

Operating experience at boiling water reactors (the other type of commercial U.S. nuclear power plant), as well as recent research, has indicated debris from certain pipe-break accidents inside a containment building could potentially block PWR sumps. The NRC is requesting that PWR operators evaluate how their plants' long-term reactor core cooling systems would function, given the potential for sump blockage, and take any appropriate actions to ensure the systems would work properly.

"We want reactor operators to take into account what might happen if a lot of debris ends up on sump screens in an accident," said Bruce Boger, Director of the Division of Inspection Program Management in the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation. "Several emergency systems could require water from the sump, and the analysis we ask for will help ensure sumps remain available as an ongoing water source if an accident occurs."

The request is being made in a Generic Letter, one of several methods the NRC has for communicating with the nuclear industry. The letter outlines requested actions for reactor operators, including:

- Within 90 days of the NRC finalizing its guidance on evaluation methods (expected by the end of October), PWR operators are asked to --
 - Describe the methodology to be used in evaluating the long-term core cooling systems, as well as the anticipated completion date for the evaluation, and;
 - Describe how the interior of each PWR containment building will be examined during the evaluation, as well as the anticipated completion date for the examination, or justify why no such examination is needed;
- By Sept. 1, 2005 --

- Provide confirmation that the Emergency Core Cooling System and Containment Spray System comply with regulations, or will do so, including a description of the plant's configuration once all modifications are finished, and;
- Provide a schedule for all corrective actions to be taken, starting no later than April 1, 2006, and finishing by Dec. 31, 2007.

The Generic Letter is available electronically through the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html> , by entering accession number ML042360586 . Help in using ADAMS is available from the NRC's Public Document Room at 800-397-4209 or 301-415-4737.

The NRC web site also contains a section dealing with staff activities on the PWR containment sump issue, available at this address: <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/ops-experience/pwr-sump-performance.html> .

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