



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>

No. 05-072

April 26, 2005

NRC CHAIRMAN STRESSES SAFETY WHILE UPDATING SENATE ON NEW REACTOR LICENSING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

WASHINGTON – Chairman Nils J. Diaz, testifying on behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, told a Senate committee Tuesday the agency has a solid process in place to license new nuclear power plants in the United States, but could face challenges in assigning resources to handle a possible influx of license applications.

Available components of the NRC's licensing structure for new reactors – design certification, early site permits and the combined construction/operating license – “are providing a means to enhance safety for nuclear power generation in the future,” Diaz told the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

The agency expects industry demand for such activity to grow more rapidly than previously planned. The NRC may be faced with a significant increase in its workload for new reactor licensing, including receipt of up to five combined license applications in the next few years.

The NRC's regulations should provide a stable, efficient and predictable framework for licensing and overseeing reactors, Diaz added. The committee's hearing concerned the Energy Department's “Nuclear Power 2010” initiative for new U.S. nuclear power generation.

The NRC's Part 52 licensing process is designed to resolve safety and environmental issues, including emergency preparedness and siting issues, early in the process, for utilities that might wish to pursue a new reactor license.

The NRC's reactor design certification process has already approved three designs, is in the process of certifying a fourth, and expects to start reviewing a fifth design this summer. The agency could see several more design applications in the near future. The NRC is also reviewing three early site permit applications.

U.S. utilities have yet to submit applications under the agency's combined construction/operating license process, which if completed would allow a new reactor to be built. This process allows applicants to seek, in a single application, a license authorizing both construction and operation prior to construction.

###