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NRC STAFF DIRECTED TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON BLENDING LOW LEVEL WASTE

Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko has directed the agency staff to develop a vote paper for the Commission to consider issues related to blending of low-level waste.

Since the closing of a low-level waste disposal facility at Barnwell, S.C., last year, said Jaczko in a memo to the staff, "We have received several inquiries from stakeholders asking us to clarify the agency's position on blending and what is acceptable under our regulations and guidance, especially with respect to blending that results in a change in classification of the waste under 10 CFR Part 61.55."

He noted that the staff has already identified revision of the Branch Technical Position on Concentration Averaging and Encapsulation as a high priority item in the Low-Level Waste Strategic Assessment published in 2007.

"I am certain there are policy issues related to blending that will need to be considered by the Commission," said Jaczko, giving the staff six months to prepare a vote paper on the topic.

Jaczko said the staff should specifically consider:

- Issues related to intentional changes in waste classification due to blending, including safety, security, and policy considerations
- Protection of the public, the intruder, and the environment
- Mathematical concentration averaging and homogeneous physical mixing
- Practical considerations in operating a waste treatment facility, disposal facility, or other facilities, including the appropriate point at which waste should be classified
- Recommendations for revisions, if necessary, to existing regulations, requirements, guidance, or oversight related to blending of LLW

Blending refers to mixing low-level waste of different concentrations. It generally does not involve mixing radioactive waste with non-radioactive waste, and it concerns only waste for disposal or storage, not for release.

With the closure of Barnwell to low-level waste from all but Connecticut, New Jersey and South Carolina, licensees in 36 states no longer have access to disposal capacity for Class B and C wastes. The need for these licensees – primarily nuclear power plants, medical facilities and research institutes – to store waste on site for an extended period until disposal capacity becomes available has led to increased industry interest in blending.

There are two other low-level waste disposal facilities in the country. One in Richland, Wash., is open only to licensees in states belonging to the Northwest and Rocky Mountain Compacts (N.M., Colo., Nev., Utah, Wyo., Mont., Idaho, Ore., Hawaii, Alaska and Wash.). A facility in Clive, Utah, can accept Class A waste from any U.S. generator.

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