



NRC NEWS

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Office of Public Affairs Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

E-mail: opa.resource@nrc.gov

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

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NRC APPROVES USE OF ADVANCED FIRE PROTECTION STANDARD AT OCONEE NUCLEAR PLANT IN SOUTH CAROLINA

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has approved the Oconee Nuclear Station's adoption of the National Fire Protection Association's "Performance-Based Standard for Fire Protection for Light-Water Reactor Electric Generating Plants" (NFPA 805).

"This is an important milestone in the continuing effort to strengthen fire protection regulations at U.S. nuclear power plants," said Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko. "After making safety improvements, Oconee becomes the second applicant to receive NRC approval to transition to the new fire protection standard. Approval of Oconee's application also starts a six-month clock for the other reactors to submit their fire protection license amendment requests to the NRC."

NFPA 805 describes how existing U.S. reactors can provide acceptable fire protection programs by applying risk-informed, performance-based requirements and fundamental fire protection design elements. Under the NFPA 805 standard, reactor owners and operators perform engineering analyses to demonstrate their installed fire protection systems and features will meet specific fire protection and nuclear safety goals, objectives, and performance criteria. These comprehensive evaluations of fire safety measures allow U.S. reactors to focus their resources in the most appropriate manner.

Plant owners must also install additional equipment or take other measures if the analyses call for them. In the case of Oconee, the NFPA 805 analysis led the plant to make several modifications, including installation of additional fire detection systems and upgraded fire barriers. The NRC's safety evaluation for Oconee's transition concludes the plant has documented and demonstrated its fire safety enhancements.

The NFPA issued the standard in 2001, and the NRC provided extensive opportunity for the public and the fire safety community to participate in the agency's examination of the standard. The NRC incorporated the standard in 2004 as a voluntary alternative to existing fire protection regulations. Oconee, located 30 miles west of Greenville, S.C., and the Shearon Harris plant, located 20 miles southwest of Raleigh, N.C., volunteered in 2005 to lead the industry's pilot implementation program. Oconee submitted its formal application to switch to NFPA 805 in May 2008 and revised the application in April 2010.

An additional 46 reactors at 29 sites, representing 17 utilities, have told the NRC they plan to adopt the NFPA 805 approach. The NRC expects other U.S. nuclear power plants will consider adopting this approach once the industry gains experience in implementing the standard. For those plants choosing not to transition to NFPA 805, the Commission has determined that licensees must have identified all fire-induced circuit failure violations and noncompliances, as well as implement compensatory measures. These licensees were granted a total of 36 months of enforcement discretion to end November 2012.

More information on the NFPA 805 approach and fire protection at U.S. nuclear power plants is available on the NRC website here: <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/ops-experience/fire-protection.html>.

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