



NRC NEWS

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NRC ESTABLISHES SENIOR MANAGEMENT GROUP TO REVIEW GROUNDWATER TASK FORCE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has established a senior management review group to evaluate the findings and recommendations of the internal Groundwater Task Force and identify possible policy issues for Commission consideration. The management group will decide whether it agrees with the independent Task Force analysis and how best to act upon the conclusions and recommendations contained in the final report.

The group will identify policy issues for consideration by the Commission and refer non-policy decisions to the staff for action. In addition, the group will determine whether the Task Force's conclusions or recommendations should be expanded and will seek feedback from external stakeholders.

The Groundwater Task Force issued its final report June 11, containing conclusions based on several months' evaluation of the agency's past, current and planned actions regarding radioactive contamination of groundwater and soil at U.S. nuclear power plants.

"The Task Force provided a valuable service to the agency in conducting an independent review of the issues that the NRC senior management review group can utilize as it decides the best path forward," said Executive Director for Operations Bill Borchardt.

The staff Task Force, which consulted with numerous public stakeholders in developing its report, determined that NRC is meeting its mission of protecting public health, safety, and the environment by correctly applying existing requirements and properly characterizing the relevant issues. The releases have not exceeded the limits the NRC sets to ensure public health and safety, nor have the leaks interfered with the proper functioning of the plants' safety systems.

"Our Task Force re-examined past agency actions and those actions taken by nuclear facilities with regard to tritium contamination in order to see if we need to do more," said Charles Casto, deputy administrator of the NRC's Region IV office, who led the task force. "Based on that evaluation, we have developed recommendations intended to improve and strengthen the NRC's response to groundwater incidents."

The recommendations cover the NRC's policies, programs, and communications associated with the oversight of groundwater incidents. They fall into four broad categories: (1) reassessing the NRC's regulatory framework to better include groundwater protection, (2) maintaining the barriers designed to confine tritium and other licensed material, (3) creating more reliable NRC responses, and (4) strengthening trust. The Task Force's 16 conclusions discuss communications, the regulatory framework, and processes and practices associated with the oversight of groundwater incidents. The report's key recommendations to strengthen NRC response to groundwater incidents include:

- Identify policy issues associated with assessing the NRC's groundwater protection regulatory framework;
- Once the policy issues are addressed, implement appropriate enhancements;
- Consider developing specific actions to address the report's key themes and conclusions;
- Work with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, state agencies and international regulators to develop a collaborative approach for enhancing groundwater protection strategies; and
- Consider including discussions on public health when communicating with stakeholders.

The Groundwater Task Force Report and the EDO's memorandum establishing the senior management review group, as well as additional information, are available on the NRC website at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/ops-experience/grndwtr-contam-tritium.html>.

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