



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>

No. 08-008

January 22, 2008

NRC PROPOSES NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSEES TO AVOID FUTURE LEGACY SITES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission seeks public comment on a proposed rule designed to prevent future “legacy sites” with insufficient funds for decommissioning by requiring licensees to minimize the introduction of residual radioactivity at their sites during operations.

The proposed rule, published today in the *Federal Register*, would require licensees to keep survey records of residual radioactivity, including in the subsurface soil and groundwater, with records important for decommissioning. The proposed rule would also require certain licensees to report additional details in their decommissioning cost estimates and amend some financial assurance mechanisms for decommissioning planning.

Facilities that process large quantities of material, especially in liquid form, have the potential for significant environmental contamination due to the scale of their operations. Leaks from these facilities can lead to significant radioactive contamination of the subsurface soil and groundwater, even though the radiation doses from these releases are well below annual regulatory limits for public and occupational exposure.

In addition, the high costs of disposing radioactive material offsite may lead licensees to store more waste onsite, increasing the potential for subsurface radioactive contamination and significantly higher decommissioning costs.

Licensees are currently required to perform surveys to verify that radioactive effluent releases are below regulatory requirements and do not pose public health hazards. However, the NRC believes that existing regulations are not clear enough concerning subsurface contamination and require interpretation to apply to long-term environmental conditions. Surveys have rarely been performed to assess the radiological

hazard of chronic releases and subsurface contamination because these are not considered effluent releases and they do not cause immediate exposure either to workers or the public approaching regulatory limits.

Proposed changes to financial assurance requirements would require more detailed reporting by licensees and would place tighter NRC control over certain financial instruments set aside to cover eventual decommissioning costs.

Comments on the proposed rule should be submitted by April 7. Comments may be mailed to the Secretary, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C., 20555-0001, ATTN: Rulemaking and Adjudications Staff. They may also be e-mailed to SECY@nrc.gov , or faxed to (301) 415-1101. Please note “RIN 3150-AH45” in the subject line.

###

News releases are available through a *free listserv* subscription at the following Web address: <http://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/listserver.html> . The NRC homepage at www.nrc.gov also offers a SUBSCRIBE link. E-mail notifications are sent to subscribers when news releases are posted to NRC's Web site.