



NRC NEWS

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ENERGY BILL PROVIDES FOR ENHANCED SECURITY AT COMMERCIAL NUCLEAR FACILITIES

The energy bill signed today by President Bush contains provisions long sought by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to enhance security at nuclear power plants and other facilities, including authorization for licensee security guards to use more powerful weaponry and more extensive background checks for personnel with access to nuclear materials or safeguards information.

“This wide-ranging legislation enhances our ability to ensure the protection of public health, safety and the common defense,” said NRC Chairman Nils J. Diaz. “These provisions will make an industry that is already well protected even safer from the threats of terrorism and radiological sabotage.”

Under this legislation, the NRC will for the first time have regulatory authority over additional radioactive materials, including certain sources of radium-226 and materials produced in accelerators rather than in reactors.

The energy bill also contains specific security-related requirements that in large degree address measures already initiated by the NRC. These include revisions to the agency’s design basis threat through rulemaking and establishment of a national tracking system for radioactive sources in the United States.

The act also expands criminal penalties for anyone bringing in unauthorized weapons or explosives or committing sabotage at nuclear power plants and other licensee facilities designated by the NRC.

Other provisions in the bill will facilitate NRC’s recruitment of engineers, scientists, security experts and other professionals at a time when the agency anticipates a greatly increased workload due to potential applications for new commercial power reactors and the proposed Yucca Mountain waste repository. The NRC is now authorized to support university programs for academic fields critical to the agency’s regulatory activities and to establish partnership programs with minority institutions of higher learning. NRC may also award financial assistance to undergraduate and graduate students in return for subsequent employment with the NRC.

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