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COMMISSION DIRECTS NRC STAFF TO PREPARE A NEW RULE
UPGRADING SECURITY REQUIREMENTS AT NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The staff of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun preparing a new rule that would require nuclear power plant licensees to periodically conduct drills and exercises to test the adequacy of their programs for safeguarding nuclear plants from terrorist attacks.

Under the new rule, drills and exercises will occur more frequently than under the Operational Safeguards Response Evaluations (OSRE) program. In addition, the new program will have more standards for evaluation than OSRE.

Where weaknesses are identified, the new rule will require licensees to strengthen their security programs. NRC will likely continue to use private contractors to assist in its evaluation of the performance of its licensees during drills and exercises in which a mock terrorist force attempts to compromise the security of nuclear power plants by gaining access to vital equipment. The NRC staff also will develop detailed guidance on how to implement the new rule, and provide inspection procedures and training for NRC staff.

The new program will replace OSRE, but will retain many of the most important elements of the program in place since 1991, including a requirement for field exercises using mock terrorists.

Eight nuclear plants that have not been evaluated under OSRE will be assessed under a modified form of the program. The new security program will be incorporated into the NRC's new baseline inspection program when it is fully implemented early next year, following a pilot program evaluation now underway at nine nuclear plants throughout the country.

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