

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC SCHEDULES THIRD MEETING TO OBTAIN PUBLIC VIEWS ON REVISION OF NUCLEAR FUEL FACILITY INSPECTION PROGRAM

The NRC will meet on December 15 in Rockville, Maryland, to obtain suggestions for revising the agency's safety inspection program for nuclear fuel cycle and uranium enrichment facilities.

This meeting is the third of several to be held over the next two years to factor public comments into the revised fuel facility safety inspection program. At last month's meeting, the NRC staff presented its rationale for establishing certain indicators to assess a facility's safety performance. The December meeting seeks public comments on the possible use of those performance indicators.

The initiative to revise the safety inspection and oversight program for fuel facilities reflects the agency's desire to apply more objective and safety-significant criteria in assessing the performance of all its licensees, as well as the need to effectively regulate with a smaller staff and budget. This initiative will employ lessons learned from the revised commercial nuclear reactor inspection and oversight program, which is undergoing a pilot test program.

The nuclear fuel cycle begins with the milling of uranium ore to produce uranium concentrate called "yellowcake." The yellowcake is converted into uranium hexafluoride gas at a special facility and loaded into cylinders. The cylinders are sent to a gaseous diffusion plant, where uranium is enriched for use as reactor fuel. The enriched uranium is then converted into oxide powder, fabricated into fuel pellets, loaded into fuel rods, and bundled into assemblies at a fuel fabrication facility. Bundled assemblies are then transported to nuclear power plants, non-power reactor facilities, and naval propulsion reactors for use as fuel.

The NRC currently inspects these fuel facilities several times a year in a variety of technical areas, such as chemical process, fire, nuclear criticality, radiation safety, and safeguards. The goals of the new initiative are to focus inspections on activities where the potential safety risks are greatest, obtain more objective indicators of safety performance, increase public confidence in the NRC, and optimize regulatory effectiveness and efficiency.

The meeting, which is open to the public, will be held in the Regency Conference Room of the Doubletree Hotel at 1750 Rockville Pike from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Parking is limited; however, the hotel is located adjacent to the Twinbrook Station on the Metro's Red Line. Those who seek background information on this initiative may obtain transcripts of last month's meeting on the website at www.nrc.gov/NMSS/FCSS/revised/fcindex.html

Interested persons can also access SECY 99-188, "Evaluation and Proposed Revision of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle Safety Inspection Program," from the agency's website, at www.nrc.gov/NRC/COMMISSION/SECYS/index.html or from the Public Document Room, telephone 202-634-3273.

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