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NRC REQUESTS INFORMATION FROM NUCLEAR POWER PLANT LICENSEES ABOUT OVERALL YEAR 2000 READINESS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has requested all utilities operating nuclear power plants to inform NRC of steps they are taking to ensure their power plants will be able to function after January 1, 2000, to maintain stability of the national electric power grid.

The request for information is broader in scope than previous requests for information. The new request includes systems necessary for continued plant operation which are not covered by the terms and conditions of the plant's license and NRC regulations. Consequently, this information does not require submittal under oath or affirmation. Utilities have a choice whether they report by July 1 on their plants' Y2K readiness for systems within their license and NRC regulations or all those systems required for continued operation.

The "Year 2000" or Y2K problem refers to computers' potential inability to recognize dates beginning with January 1, 2000, and beyond. It is caused by computer programs that use two-digit numbers to represent a calendar year (such as "98" for 1998). If the problem is not corrected, vulnerable computer systems will read "00" as 1900, rather than 2000, possibly causing some systems or equipment to malfunction.

Earlier this year, NRC notified all utilities to provide detailed information on steps they are taking to deal with the Year 2000 computer problem in order to ensure that key computer systems will continue to function properly after January 1, 2000. Since that time, however, increased public awareness and government attention to the Year 2000 problem have resulted in concern over not only public health and safety of nuclear power plants, but also over their ability to continue to provide power.

In September, the NRC started conducting Year 2000 audits at 12 nuclear power plants. These audits, which will be completed by the end of this month, evaluate the effectiveness of measures licensees are taking to identify and correct Y2K problems at their facilities. Audit results will be used to determine if NRC needs to take further regulatory action and will be made available on the NRC web page as they are issued. Results of the first six audits have been posted.

The text of the letter sent to all utilities operating nuclear power plants will be posted on the NRC Internet web page at: <http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/NEWS/year2000>. This site has additional information relating to steps NRC is taking to deal with the Year 2000 problem.

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