



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. 00-079

May 9, 2000

NRC AMENDS REGULATIONS FOR REACTOR SAFETY ANALYSIS REQUIREMENTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is issuing a revised rule that could allow utilities to seek small increases to the authorized power level for nuclear power plants -- usually on the order of one percent -- by more accurately accounting for uncertainties in power level measurement.

At present, NRC regulations require most licensees to analyze emergency core cooling system capabilities assuming that the reactor was operating at 102 percent power if a loss-of-coolant accident occurred. This requirement, applied since 1974, was intended to provide an additional safety margin to assure adequate emergency cooling. It was necessary because of uncertainties in the accuracy of reactor power measurement.

Recently, licensees have sought credit for improved instrumentation that is now available that can measure reactor power levels more precisely, therefore eliminating the need for the two percent uncertainty margin currently required. NRC has granted an exemption from the current requirement to one utility using such updated technology. The rule change is needed to avert the need to process many similar exemption requests.

The rule change offers licensees additional operating flexibility, including the opportunity to increase licensed power in some cases. Licensees gaining NRC approval for small increases in licensed power level on the basis of the amended rule could realize significant economic benefits.

The NRC believes that this move will help increase regulatory efficiency without compromising safety at nuclear power plants. Safety is maintained because there is substantial safety margin in other parts of the analyses of emergency core cooling system capabilities. Also, slight changes in the power level assumed for analysis are expected to yield only small changes to the analysis results.

The proposed rule change was issued for public comment on October 1, 1999, and amends the current requirement in Appendix K, Part 50, of Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Other provisions are described in a notice to be published in an upcoming edition of the *Federal Register*. The revised rule becomes effective 60 days after publication in the *Federal Register*.

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