



NRC NEWS

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NRC AMENDS REGULATIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS FOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT LICENSE RENEWAL APPLICATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has approved amendments to its environmental protection regulations ([10 CFR Part 51](#)) governing environmental impact reviews of nuclear power plant operating license renewals, redefining the number and scope of environmental issues that must be addressed and incorporating lessons learned from previous license renewal reviews.

License renewal environmental reviews are governed by regulations implemented in 1996 and the NRC's Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) for License Renewal of Nuclear Plants, NUREG-1437. The GEIS and the regulations identified 92 environmental issues relevant to license renewals; of these, 69 were labeled as Category 1 and considered "generic" issues, or applicable to all nuclear power plants and therefore covered by the GEIS. The other 23 issues (Category 2) required nuclear plant-specific reviews in a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS).

In a final rule to be published soon in the *Federal Register*, the NRC is identifying 78 environmental impact issues, of which 17 will require plant-specific analyses. The rule consolidates similar Category 1 issues, changes some Category 2 issues into Category 1 and consolidates some of them with existing Category 1 issues, and consolidates similar Category 2 issues. The changes are intended to make environmental reviews for license renewal applications more efficient for both the NRC and the industry. The NRC's commitment to public engagement and transparency is maintained and will not be affected by these changes to the environmental review process.

The final rule also adds some new Category 1 issues, including geology and soils; effects of dredging on water quality; groundwater use and quality; exposure of terrestrial organisms to radionuclides; exposure of aquatic organisms to radionuclides; effects of dredging on aquatic organisms; impacts of transmission line right-of-way management on aquatic resources; and physical occupational hazards.

Radionuclides released to groundwater and cumulative impacts were added as new Category 2 issues requiring analysis in each SEIS.

A proposed rule outlining these changes was published for public comment on July 31, 2009. NRC staff conducted six public meetings to explain the changes and receive comments, and 32 documents with comments were submitted. The comments and the staff's responses to major issues are outlined in the current *Federal Register* notice.

The final rule has been changed to reflect the June 8, 2012, ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit vacating the NRC's waste confidence decision and rule. The Commission subsequently said it would not issue licenses dependent on waste confidence, including reactor license renewals, until the court's ruling is addressed, and directed the staff to revise the rule by September 2014. The agency continues to work on licensing reviews short of final licensing decisions.

The final rule will become effective 30 days after publication in the *Federal Register*, expected after the Office of Management and Budget approves the rule's information collection requirements. Compliance will not be required, however, until one year from publication.

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