



NRC NEWS

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NRC SCHEDULES WORKSHOP ON FUEL FACILITY OVERSIGHT PROGRAM

The NRC will meet February 22-23 in Rockville, Maryland, to obtain suggestions from the public on revising the agency's oversight program for nuclear fuel cycle facilities.

This meeting is the fourth in a series to be held over a period of two years to factor public and other stakeholder comments into the revised fuel facility safety inspection program. At last December's meeting, the NRC staff received comments on the use of performance indicators to assess a facility's safety performance.

This meeting will focus on:

- Industry initiatives for identification, resolution, and correction of problems
- Objective and scope of safety and safeguards oversight program cornerstones
- Key safety and safeguards risk attributes for each cornerstone
- Safety and safeguards performance attributes the NRC needs to monitor and assess to ensure cornerstone objectives are met, and
- Performance monitoring attributes and means.

The initiative to revise the safety and safeguards oversight program for fuel facilities reflects the agency's desire to apply more objective and risk-significant criteria in assessing the performance of all its licensees, as well as the need to regulate effectively and with improved efficiency. This initiative will employ lessons learned from the revised commercial nuclear reactor oversight program, which has just completed 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 reactor fuel assemblies at a fuel fabrication facility. 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 oversight on activities where the potential risks are greatest, obtain more objective indicators of risk-related performance, increase public confidence in the NRC's inspection program, and increase regulatory effectiveness and efficiency.

The meeting, which is open to the public, will be held in the auditorium of the agency's Two White Flint North building at 11545 Rockville Pike, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Parking is limited; however, the auditorium is located across from the White Flint Metro Station. Those who seek background information on this initiative may obtain transcripts of past meetings on the website at www.nrc.gov/NMSS/FCSS/FCOB/INSP/REVISED/fcindex.htm

Interested persons can also access a related staff paper, 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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