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NRC SCHEDULES SECOND MEETING TO OBTAIN PUBLIC VIEWS ON REVISION OF FUEL FACILITY INSPECTION PROGRAM

The NRC has scheduled a meeting on October 20 in Rockville, Maryland, to obtain suggestions on revising the agency's safety inspection program for fuel cycle and uranium enrichment facilities.

This meeting is the second one held on the inspection initiative. At last month's meeting, NRC received valuable suggestions from stakeholders affected by the agency's fuel facility inspection program on the concept and approach of the revision. This meeting is intended to explain a draft detailed safety inspection framework for stakeholder consideration, and to obtain views on such a framework.

The agency currently licenses, certifies and inspects commercial nuclear fuel facilities involved in the processing and fabrication of uranium ore into reactor fuel. These facilities possess large quantities of materials that are potentially hazardous (radioactive, toxic or combustible) to workers, the public and the environment. The NRC regulates these facilities to ensure the adequacy of measures taken to protect against radiological consequences and chemical exposures associated with NRC licensed material.

The initiative to revise the safety inspection and oversight program for these 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 mining and milling of uranium to produce uranium concentrate (called "yellowcake"). The yellowcake is converted into uranium hexafluoride gas at a conversion 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 facilities several times a year in a variety of technical areas, such as chemical process, fire, nuclear criticality, and radiation safety. The goal of the new initiative is to focus inspections on activities where the potential safety risks may be greater, obtain more objective indicators of safety performance, increase public confidence, and optimize regulatory effectiveness and efficiency.

This meeting is the second of several to be held over the next two years to factor public comments into the revised fuel facility safety inspection program.

The meeting will be held in the auditorium of the agency's Two White Flint North Building, at 11545 Rockville Pike, from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Those who seek background information on this initiative may obtain transcripts of last month's meeting on the website at http://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 Facility Safety Inspection Program" from the agency's website, at http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/COMMISSION/SECYS/index.html, or from the Public Document Room, telephone 202-634-3273.

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