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No. 98-173

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Tuesday, September 22, 1998)

COMMISSION ORDERS HALT TO PROCEEDINGS  
IN SEABROOK LICENSE AMENDMENT CASE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has ordered an NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board to halt all proceedings in a case involving a proposed operating license amendment for the Seabrook nuclear power plant in New Hampshire, pending further direction from the Commission.

North Atlantic Energy Service Corporation seeks to amend the Seabrook license to permit inspection of the plant's steam generator tubes at 24-month, rather than 18-month, intervals. The request is before an NRC Licensing Board because intervening parties have asked for a hearing.

In an order issued Thursday (September 17), the Commission said it is taking jurisdiction now because one matter in the case is a novel issue that could benefit from early Commission review. This question is whether the utility can bring about a major operational change, such as a lengthened fuel cycle, through several incremental license amendments, rather than a single licensing action. The Seacoast Anti-Pollution League (SAPL), intervenor in the case, contends that, without reviewing the change as a whole, NRC may not be able to assess the safety implications accurately.

The Commission also has taken review of the Licensing Board's rulings as to who may intervene in the proceeding. The Licensing Board recently admitted SAPL as an intervenor and denied intervention to the New England Coalition on Nuclear Pollution.

All parties -- the utility, the parties seeking intervention, and the NRC staff -- are now free to file briefs with the Commission supporting or opposing any aspect of that Licensing Board ruling. Initial briefs are due no later than October 7. Reply briefs to any party's pleadings are due no later than October 14.

Under its Rules of Procedure and a new policy statement issued in July, the Commission has inherent supervisory authority over the conduct of legal proceedings.

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EDITORS: The text of the Commission order will be posted on the NRC Internet web page.