NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. 01-117 October 2, 2001

NRC AMENDS REGULATIONS TO ALLOW USE OF SIMULATORS TO FULFILL PORTION OF REACTOR OPERATOR TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is amending its regulations to allow applicants for nuclear power plant operator licenses the option of using simulators, rather than the controls of actual nuclear plants, in fulfilling a portion of their experience requirements.

Over the last 14 years, simulator fidelity, operator training, and simulator testing have improved significantly. Given these improvements, the NRC is revising its regulations to allow candidates to perform reactor control manipulations either on a plant-referenced simulator or on the actual plant. The NRC's requirements will ensure that simulators mimic expected plant performance and that candidates for operator licenses receive the same overall experience in the principles of safe operation as they would on the plant itself. Use of simulators will also minimize interruptions of actual plant operations.

The changes will eliminate outdated requirements for utility certification of simulation facilities and eliminate routine submittals to the NRC of simulator performance test reports. However, performance test results will have to be maintained onsite. The revisions will also allow utilities to revise their simulator performance testing programs to be compatible with updated industry standards.

Computerized control room simulators must meet strict requirements and create training and testing conditions in an environment comparable to those of the actual plant control room. Realistic scenarios, which mirror situations that could actually occur under certain plant conditions, are developed and used for testing of applicants. The NRC will maintain the integrity of the operator training and testing process, confirming simulator suitability through its inspection and operator licensing processes.

To obtain an operator license, candidates must possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to operate the plant in a safe manner. Eligibility for a reactor operator license calls for a combination of rigorous education, training and experience. The final rule does not change any of the current requirements for training. In addition to experience gained on the simulator, candidates for an operator license will still spend a substantial amount of time under instruction performing the duties of a licensed operator on the actual plant.

A proposed rule on this subject was published in the Federal Register on July 3, 2000, for public comments. Changes made as a result of the comments received are discussed in a Federal Register notice to be published shortly.

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