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# NRC NEWS

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## **NRC APPROVES FINAL RULE AMENDING ABWR REACTOR DESIGN CERTIFICATION TO INCLUDE CONSIDERATION OF AIRCRAFT IMPACTS**

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has directed its staff to publish a final rule amending the Advanced Boiling Water Reactor (ABWR) design certification to address the effects of the impact of a large commercial aircraft, in accordance with the NRC's 2009 aircraft impact assessment rule. STP Nuclear Operating Company (STPNOC) submitted an application to amend the ABWR design in June 2009. The rule approved today by the Commission, along with the staff's discussion of the rule basis, is available on the NRC [website](#). The final text as published may differ somewhat to reflect changes directed by the Commission.

The rule certifies that STPNOC's option for the ABWR design has appropriately accounted for aircraft impact effects. This means that following such an impact, only minimal operator actions would be necessary to meet two conditions: a) the reactor core remains cooled or the containment remains intact; and b) spent nuclear fuel cooling or spent fuel pool integrity is maintained. The rule will become effective 30 days after its publication in the *Federal Register*, expected shortly.

The NRC certified the original ABWR design in 1997, and it can be referenced by a company applying for a license to build and operate a nuclear power plant. The NRC has taken several steps to improve security at existing nuclear power plants, including adopting a rule in March 2007 that requires both existing and potential new reactors to defend against a more realistic threat. The agency also issued a February 2002 Order requiring all existing nuclear power plants to develop and adopt mitigative strategies to cope with large fires and explosions from any cause, including potential aircraft impacts. The NRC issued an updated security rule in March 2009, codifying these requirements for all existing and future nuclear power plants.

The agency does not believe nuclear power plant operators should be required to prevent the impact of large commercial aircraft; that responsibility rests with the federal government. The NRC works closely with other federal agencies such as NORAD, the Federal Aviation Administration and the intelligence community to provide layered protection against such a

threat. The agency expects these efforts would effectively preclude an aircraft attack from occurring. Should such an unlikely event take place at a new plant designed in accordance with the new rule, the NRC expects the plant would be better able to withstand such a crash than the same design without changes resulting from the rule.

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