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NRC PLANS FOR Y2K CONTINGENCIES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has developed a contingency plan for dealing with computer problems that could conceivably develop at a licensed nuclear facility at the start off the Year 2000. Part of the plan includes a proposed policy statement on the use of enforcement discretion during the Y2K transition.

The "Year 2000" or Y2K problem refers to computers' potential inability to recognize dates beginning with January 1, 2000, and beyond. It arises from computer programs that use two-digit numbers to represent a calendar year (such as "98" for 1998). For example, computer systems could read "00" as 1900, rather than 2000, potentially causing computer systems to malfunction.

The NRC has been working with its licensees to ensure that potential Y2K issues have been identified and corrected and that the agency's own computer systems continue to function properly during the transition from 1999 into 2000. Based on NRC's Y2K reviews and audits of nuclear power plants and other licensed facilities, all licensees are expected to be Y2K ready well before December 31, and the Y2K transition will not affect continued safe operation of their facilities.

Although the need for NRC action during the Y2K transition is considered unlikely, the NRC has developed a contingency plan for ensuring that public health and safety and the environment will continue to be protected, even if unforeseen Y2K problems occur at a licensed nuclear facility. The plan has three major facets:

- Incident response -- How the agency will be prepared to respond if a safety-significant event should occur as a result of a Y2K problem at a nuclear power plant or other NRC-licensed facility.
- Information Sharing -- Communicating any Y2K problems reported by U.S. nuclear power plants or those abroad and passing on the information to domestic plant operators.
- Regulatory response -- Monitoring licensee activities during the Y2K transition. Being prepared to respond to licensees' requests that certain requirements for licensed facilities not be enforced so long as the safety implications are small and using such "enforcement discretion" would help maintain a reliable and stable electrical grid.

The plan calls for staffing NRC's headquarters Operations Center in Rockville, Maryland, beginning at noon on December 31. Backup will be provided by NRC's regional

office in Arlington, Texas. NRC staff will be stationed at each nuclear power plant site and uranium enrichment facility site as well as in each NRC regional Incident Response Center in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; and Lisle, Illinois. In addition, portable satellite telephones will provide backup communication, if needed, at each plant and facility site.

Comments received on the draft contingency plan published last December have been incorporated to the extent applicable. The full text of the final plan along with disposition of public comments is available from NRC's Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. and at our Y2K Website at www.nrc.gov/NRC/NEWS/year2000.html.

The proposed interim enforcement policy on exercising enforcement discretion during the Y2K transition is available for public comment at the same locations identified above. Comments will be considered in the next revision to NRC's enforcement policy.

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