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NRC REQUIRES INFORMATION FROM URANIUM PROCESSORS ABOUT "YEAR 2000" COMPUTER READINESS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has notified licensees and certificate holders who process uranium to produce fuel for nuclear power plants that they are required to inform the NRC of steps being taken to ensure their computer systems will function properly by the year 2000 and beyond.

Notifications went to those who operate uranium hexafluoride production plants, uranium enrichment plants and uranium fuel fabrication plants.

By September 21, the companies must submit, in writing, whether they have a program under way to deal with the "Year 2000" computer problem. They must also notify the NRC no later than December 31 as to whether their facility is "Year 2000 Ready." If not, the company must provide a status report of work remaining to be done, including completion schedules. Subsequent responses must be submitted if the situation changes.

"Year 2000 Ready" is defined as a computer system or application that has been determined to be suitable for continued use in the year 2000 and beyond.

The "Year 2000" problem refers to computers' potential inability to recognize dates beginning with January 1, 2000. It is caused by computer programs that use two-digit numbers to represent a calendar year (such as "98" for 1998). If the problem is not corrected, vulnerable computer systems will read "00" as 1900, rather than 2000, possibly causing some systems or equipment to malfunction.

Examples of systems that may be affected include those for material control and accounting and physical protection, computer security, emergency response, radiation monitoring, and plant process control.

The text of the notification to licensees and certificate holders will be posted on the NRC Internet web page at http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/NEWS/year2000.html.

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