

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, DC 20555
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234
Internet:opa@nrc.gov

No. 98-08

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Tuesday, January 13, 1998)

NRC TO END ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING PROGRAM WITH STATES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has ended its contracts with 34 states to perform radiation monitoring around certain nuclear facilities at the end of 1997.

Elimination of this program, however, will not impact the NRC's ability to monitor and regulate safety at the facilities. Licensees are required to continue their own environmental monitoring activities to verify that radiation levels around their facilities are negligible.

The separate monitoring program began in the 1970s as a joint effort between NRC and the states to independently compare the results of environmental measurements with those performed by NRC licensees. The program was also intended to help states develop their own radiological health programs, but not to fully fund them. Participation by states was voluntary.

In April 1995, NRC requested public comment on its plans to eliminate the program, citing both the cost (over \$1 million a year) and the excellent record of licensees in maintaining their own environmental monitoring programs. NRC also reviewed this issue as part of its strategic assessment and rebaselining initiative.

Based on this review, the staff has determined that information received from the states appears to be of limited value from a safety perspective. In addition, staff believes that states have been provided ample opportunities to develop their own regulatory programs with financial and technical assistance provided by the NRC for more than 20 years.

NRC requires licensees to monitor extensively the air, water, soil, and food products (milk and food crops) around their facilities. Laboratories where licensees' samples are analyzed must be cross-checked with other laboratories to insure precision and accuracy of measurements. All measurements are submitted annually to NRC and placed in local public document rooms. NRC also inspects licensees' conformance with the requirements on a regular basis.

Licensees may still contract with outside entities (including states) to perform

environmental monitoring if they choose. However, the NRC holds each licensee ultimately responsible for adequate monitoring regardless of who performs it.

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