



NRC NEWS

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NRC APPROVES 40-YEAR LICENSE RENEWAL FOR INDEPENDENT SPENT FUEL STORAGE INSTALLATION AT SURRY NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has authorized the staff to issue a 40-year license renewal to Dominion Generation for its dry-cask independent spent fuel storage installation at the Surry nuclear power plant in Surry, Va., after appropriate license conditions are developed.

This will be the first license renewal granted to a dry-cask spent fuel storage installation. In approving the new license for a duration of 40 years, the Commission approved granting Dominion an exemption from NRC regulations that specify a 20-year license term and directed the NRC staff to explore potential rulemaking to change the license duration in NRC regulations. The Commission also directed the staff to approve the same exemption in its ongoing review of the license renewal application of Progress Energy for its dry-cask spent fuel storage installation at the H.B. Robinson nuclear plant in South Carolina.

The new Surry license will be issued once the agency and the licensee have finalized any needed maintenance and inspection requirements that will be included as conditions in the license.

“We are confident that casks meeting NRC’s strict standards will be able to store spent fuel safely over an extended period,” said Larry Camper, deputy director of the NRC’s Spent Fuel Project Office. “Even so, the license conditions and our inspections of the facility will ensure that the effects of aging do not degrade the casks’ ability to protect the public and the environment.”

Surry was the first commercial nuclear plant to be licensed by the NRC to operate an independent spent fuel storage installation. Its license, issued in 1986, expires next year. There are now 30 such installations in the United States. Typically, spent fuel is moved into NRC-approved dry casks after cooling at least five years in pools of water. Surry’s spent fuel pools are at capacity, making continued use of dry-cask storage essential if the plant’s two reactors are to continue to operate to the end of their current operating licenses in 2032 and 2033.

The NRC continues to view dry casks as an interim or temporary storage method for spent nuclear fuel until a permanent repository for high-level nuclear waste is available. The Commission found in 1990 as part of its revised Waste Confidence Decision that spent fuel could be safely stored in spent fuel pools or dry casks without significant environmental impact for at least 100 years. The Commission reaffirmed its finding in 1999.

The original 20-year license period was a policy decision by the Commission at a time when the Department of Energy was expected to begin receiving spent fuel for disposal in a repository by 1998. Given the need for continued interim storage of spent fuel until a repository is available, the Commission approved granting Dominion's request for an exemption from the 20-year limit. Progress Energy requested a similar exemption in its February 2004 application to renew the license of the H.B. Robinson storage installation.

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