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NRC Approves Changes to San Onofre Nuclear Plant's Emergency Planning Requirements

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has granted Southern California Edison's request to alter the emergency preparedness plan for the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS) in San Clemente, Calif., to reflect the plant's decommissioning status.

The changes come in the form of exemptions from certain NRC requirements that may not be appropriate for a plant that has permanently ceased operations. Once the licensee implements the exemptions, state and local governments may rely on comprehensive emergency management ("all hazard") planning for off-site emergency response to events at SONGS, rather than having a dedicated offsite radiological emergency response plan approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. As a result, there will not be a 10-mile emergency planning zone identified in the license for SONGS. The plant will maintain an onsite emergency plan and response capabilities, including the continued notification of state and local government officials for an emergency declaration.

Southern California Edison provided analyses to show the exemptions are warranted because when compared to an operating power reactor, the risk of an offsite radiological release is significantly lower and the types of possible accidents significantly fewer at a nuclear power reactor that has permanently ceased operations and removed fuel from the reactor vessel. The NRC staff evaluated and confirmed these analyses and, based on the NRC staff's evaluation and recommendation, the Commission [approved the exemptions](#) March 2. The exemption package, including a safety evaluation, was issued June 4.

SONGS is a multi-unit pressurized-water reactor site located in San Diego County. Unit 1 was permanently shut down on March 6, 1993, and is currently in the decommissioning phase. Units 2 and 3 have been shut down since January 2012. All spent fuel has been permanently moved from the reactor vessels into the spent fuel pools for storage. The exemptions from certain emergency preparedness requirements are part of several changes to the plant's licensing basis and technical specifications the licensee requested to reflect the SONGS site's decommissioning status.