

designated Atomic Safety and Licensing Board will issue a notice of hearing or an appropriate order.

As required by 10 CFR 2.714, a petition for leave to intervene shall set forth with particularity the interest of the petitioner in the proceeding, and how that interest may be affected by the results of the proceeding. The petition should specifically explain the reasons why intervention should be permitted with particular reference to the following factors: (1) The nature of the petitioner's right under the Act to be made a party to the proceeding; (2) the nature and extent of the petitioner's property, financial, or other interest in the proceeding; and (3) the possible effect of any order which may be entered in the proceeding on the petitioner's interest. The petition should also identify the specific aspect(s) of the subject matter of the proceeding as to which petitioner wishes to intervene. Any person who has filed a petition for leave to intervene or who has been admitted as a party may amend the petition without requesting leave of the Board up to 15 days prior to the first prehearing conference scheduled in the proceeding, but such an amended petition must satisfy the specificity requirements described above.

Not later than 15 days prior to the first prehearing conference scheduled in the proceeding, a petitioner shall file a supplement to the petition to intervene which must include a list of the contentions which are sought to be litigated in the matter. Each contention must consist of a specific statement of the issue of law or fact to be raised or controverted. In addition, the petitioner shall provide a brief explanation of the bases of the contention and a concise statement of the alleged facts or expert opinion which support the contention and on which the petitioner intends to rely in proving the contention at the hearing. The petitioner must also provide references to those specific sources and documents of which the petitioner is aware and on which the petitioner intends to rely to establish those facts or expert opinion. Petitioner must provide sufficient information to show that a genuine dispute exists with the applicant on a material issue of law or fact. Contentions shall be limited to matters within the scope of the amendment under consideration. The contention must be one which, if proven, would entitle the petitioner to relief. A petitioner who fails to file such a supplement which satisfies these requirements with respect to at least one contention will not be permitted to participate as a party.

Those permitted to intervene become parties to the proceeding, subject to any limitations in the order granting leave to intervene, and have the opportunity to participate fully in the conduct of the hearing, including the opportunity to present evidence and cross-examine witnesses.

If the amendment is issued before the expiration of the 30-day hearing period, the Commission will make a final determination on the issue of no significant hazards consideration. If a hearing is requested, the final determination will serve to decide when the hearing is held.

If the final determination is that the amendment request involves no significant hazards consideration, the Commission may issue the amendment and make it immediately effective, notwithstanding the request for a hearing. Any hearing held would take place after issuance of the amendment.

If the final determination is that the amendment request involves a significant hazards consideration, any hearing held would take place before the issuance of any amendment.

A request for a hearing or a petition for leave to intervene must be filed with the Secretary of the Commission, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, Attention: Docketing and Services Branch, or may be delivered to the Commission's Public Document Room, the Gelman Building, 2120 L Street, NW., Washington, DC, by the above date. Where petitions are filed during the last 10 days of the notice period, it is requested that the petitioner promptly so inform the Commission by a toll-free telephone call to Western Union at 1-(800) 248-5100 (in Missouri 1-(800) 342-6700). The Western Union operator should be given Datagram Identification Number N1023 and the following message addressed to the Director, Project Directorate III-3, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001: petitioner's name and telephone number, date petition was mailed, plant name, and publication date and page number of this Federal Register notice.

A copy of the petition should also be sent to the Office of the General Counsel, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, and to Jay E. Silberg, Esquire, Shaw, Pittman, Potts and Trowbridge, 2300 N Street, NW., Washington, DC 20037, attorney for the licensee.

Nontimely filings of petitions for leave to intervene, amended petitions, supplemental petitions and/or requests for hearing will not be entertained absent a determination by the Commission, the presiding officer or the

presiding Atomic Safety and Licensing Board that the petition and/or request should be granted based upon a balancing of the factors specified in 10 CFR 2.714(a)(1)(i)-(v) and 2.714(d).

For further details with respect to this action, see the application for amendment dated February 14, 1997, which is available for public inspection at the Commission's Public Document Room, the Gelman Building, 2120 L Street, NW., Washington, DC, and at the local public document room, located at the University of Toledo, William Carlson Library, Government Documents Collection, 2801 West Bancroft Avenue, Toledo, Ohio 43606.

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 20th day of February 1997.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission,  
Allen G. Hansen,

*Project Manager, Project Directorate III-3,  
Division of Reactor Projects—III/IV, Office of  
Nuclear Reactor Regulation.*

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### Safety-Conscious Work Environment

**AGENCY:** Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

**ACTION:** Request for public comment.

**SUMMARY:** The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is considering several strategies in addressing the need for its licensees to establish and maintain a safety-conscious work environment. As discussed herein, the Commission is evaluating the development of a standardized approach that would (1) require licensees to establish and maintain a safety-conscious work environment with clearly defined attributes; (2) establish certain indicators that may be monitored and that, when considered collectively, may provide evidence of an emerging adverse trend; and (3) outline specific remedial actions that the Commission may require when it determines that a particular licensee has failed to establish or maintain a safety-conscious work environment. Before proceeding further, the NRC is seeking comments and suggestions on the various strategies being considered.

**DATES:** The comment period expires May 27, 1997. Comments received after this date will be considered if it is practical to do so, but the Commission is able to assure consideration only for comments received on or before this date.

**ADDRESSES:** Submit written comments to: David Meyer, Chief, Rules Review and Directives Branch, Division of

Freedom of Information and Publication Services, Office of Administration, Mail Stop: T6D59, U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555. Hand deliver comments to: 11555 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland, between 7:45 am and 4:15 pm, Federal workdays. Copies of comments received may be examined at the NRC Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, NW, (Lower Level), Washington, DC.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** James Lieberman, Director, Office of Enforcement, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555, (301) 504-2741.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**I. Background**

In May 1996, the Commission issued a policy statement on the "Freedom of Employees in the Nuclear Industry to Raise Safety Concerns Without Fear of Retaliation" [FR 24336]. This policy statement had first been published in draft in February 1995 [FR 7592], and was based on modified recommendations of the Allegation Review Team report published as NUREG-1499. The basic thrust of the policy statement was to clarify the

\* \* \* Commission's expectation that licensees and other employers subject to NRC authority will establish and maintain a safety-conscious work environment in which employees feel free to raise concerns both to their management and the NRC without fear of retaliation.

The Commission emphasized that problems in the work environment are most effectively prevented, identified, and resolved from within the licensee's organization, rather than by government or other outside involvement. The points of focus in the policy statement—effective processes for identifying and resolving concerns, improvements in contractor awareness, senior licensee management involvement in resolving allegations of harassment and intimidation (H&I), and employees' responsibilities in raising safety concerns—were considered generally applicable to all licensees and contractors.

While the philosophy and message of the policy statement continue to be appropriate, the findings of the Millstone Independent Review Group (MIRG) and compilation of industry-wide allegation data suggest that not all licensees are successful in maintaining a safety-conscious work environment as described in the policy statement. As discussed in NUREG-1499,

the perception of discrimination, as viewed by those involved and other employees, may be more important than whether

discrimination actually occurred in setting the tone for the work environment.

When this perception becomes widespread in a licensee's organization, it becomes exceedingly difficult for licensee management (1) to obtain the cooperation of their employees in identifying and eliminating problems adversely affecting the safety-conscious work environment, (2) to reverse the perception that raising safety concerns may cause retaliation (or that management does not welcome concerns being raised), and (3) to regain the trust and confidence of the workforce. Experience at several NRC licensed facilities suggests that additional regulatory actions may be warranted when there is evidence that the licensee may not be maintaining a safety-conscious work environment.

**II. Discussion of Using a Standardized Approach to This Issue**

The Commission believes that the NRC should focus more attention on, and, if possible, devise additional mechanisms to identify, the emergence of adverse trends in licensees' abilities to maintain a safety-conscious work environment.<sup>1</sup> While identifying these emerging trends is a difficult task, the Commission believes that the effort required will be much less than that required in "turning around" a facility where the safety-conscious work environment has already deteriorated. Moreover, if indicators can be identified that, when monitored, will provide a more timely, reliable alert to the NRC of emerging problems in a licensee's safety-conscious work environment, the Commission believes that appropriate intervention will result in a significant contribution to safety and will be well worth the effort.

Evaluating the safety consciousness of a licensee's work environment is highly subjective, and achieving reliability in such an evaluation requires careful judgment. Any one piece of data (e.g., a relatively high number of allegations made to the NRC from a given facility) can be ambiguously interpreted, and focusing on individual data to the exclusion of other information can be misleading. As discussed below, the Commission believes that judgments made in this area should be the result of periodic reviews by senior NRC management. In addition, the analyses made in this area may become more reliable and consistent if the

<sup>1</sup> In NUREG-1499, the Allegation Review Team provided an analysis of indications that a licensee's safety-conscious work environment may be deteriorating. Similar discussions and additional analysis appear in the September 1996 report of the Millstone Independent Review Group (MIRG).

Commission clarifies and promotes (1) a standard definition and attributes of a safety-conscious work environment; (2) criteria to be considered as indicators that a licensee's safety-conscious work environment may be deteriorating; and (3) NRC actions to be considered in dealing with situations where these criteria are not met (i.e., where signs indicate the emergence of an adverse trend).

As used in this context, a safety-conscious work environment is defined in the Commission's May 1996 Policy Statement as a work environment in which employees are encouraged to raise concerns and where such concerns are promptly reviewed, given the proper priority based on their potential safety significance, and appropriately resolved with timely feedback to employees. Attributes of a safety-conscious work environment include (1) a management attitude that promotes employee involvement and confidence in raising and resolving concerns; (2) a clearly communicated management policy that safety has the utmost priority, overriding, if necessary, the demands of production and project schedules; (3) a strong, independent quality assurance organization and program; (4) a training program that encourages a positive attitude toward safety; and (5) a safety ethic at all levels that is characterized by an inherently questioning attitude, attention to detail, prevention of complacency, a commitment to excellence, and personal accountability in safety matters.

Departures from such a safety-conscious work environment are not always easy to detect. However, certain indicators, particularly when considered collectively, may be viewed as providing evidence of an emerging adverse trend. These include: (1) Adverse findings by the Department of Labor (DOL) or NRC's Office of Investigation (OI) concluding that discrimination has occurred against employees for engaging in protected activity; (2) in particular, a DOL or OI finding that a hostile work environment existed for a licensee employee, or that senior licensee management was involved in the discrimination; (3) a significant increase in the rate (or a sustained high number) of complaints to the NRC that licensee employees are being subjected to harassment and intimidation (H&I); (4) a significant increase (or a sustained high number) of technical allegations made to the NRC, particularly if accompanied by low usage or a decrease in use of the licensee's employee concern program or other licensee channels for reporting concerns; and (5) other indications that

the licensee's employee concerns program or other programs for identifying and resolving problems are ineffective. Such indications might include: delays in or absence of feedback for concerns raised to the ECP; breaches of confidentiality for concerns raised to the ECP; the lack of effective evaluation, follow-up, or corrective action for concerns raised to the ECP or findings made by the licensee's QA organization; overall licensee ineffectiveness in identifying safety issues; the occurrence of repetitive or willful violations; a licensee emphasis on cost-cutting measures at the expense of safety considerations; and/or poor communication mechanisms within or among licensee groups. In some cases, these indications may be identified during routine inspections.

The licensee's departure from a safety-conscious work environment can develop gradually over a period of years and with varying degrees of licensee management awareness. As stated above, any one of the symptoms given in the preceding paragraph, taken by itself, may not indicate deterioration in the licensee's overall safety-conscious work environment, particularly if not accompanied by overall problems in operational or safety performance.<sup>2</sup> Related judgments as to the need for NRC intervention should not be made in isolation. The Commission believes that such judgments, as well as the ensuing decisions on what action would be appropriate in a given situation, would be appropriate topics of discussion at the NRC's periodic Senior Management Meetings.

Once the judgment is made that a licensee's safety-conscious work environment has deteriorated, the Commission's choice of action would be based on the symptoms that led to that judgment. Under this approach, however, the Commission would identify and promote standard options for agency action rather than treating each licensee situation on a case-by-case basis. Those options might include (but would not be limited to): (1) Requiring the licensee to establish a formal employee concerns program (if one does not already exist); (2) ordering the licensee to conduct an independent survey of the environment for raising concerns, with periodic follow-up surveys to monitor progress; (3) ordering the licensee to establish an independent

group for oversight of maintaining a safety-conscious work environment (similar to that prescribed by the October 24, 1996, Millstone order); or (4) mandating that the licensee establish a "holding period" policy to be applied in cases where an employee complains of being discriminated against for engaging in protected activity (additional discussion of the holding period concept is given below).

### III. Establishing a Regulation on Safety-Conscious Work Environment

One strategy to standardizing the Commission's approach to this area would be to initiate a rulemaking process, in which the regulations of 10 CFR Part 50, "Domestic Licensing of Production and Utilization Facilities," would be amended. The possible value of promulgating this strategy as a regulation is as follows. First, it would codify the safety-conscious work environment as a requirement, clearly linked to the licensee's safety ethic and to the overall fitness of the licensee to operate the facility. Second, such a regulation could successfully differentiate between licensees who perform well in this area and those who are cause for concern, in that prescriptive requirements would only be remedial (i.e., prescribed for those licensees who fail to establish and maintain a sufficiently safety-conscious work environment on their own efforts). Third, for those cases requiring Commission intervention in the form of issuing orders, the presence of a standardized process (i.e., as codified in a regulation or suggested in a policy statement) may result in less litigation than would result if such orders were devised and issued case by case in the absence of such a standardized approach.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission's experience indicates that licensees may successfully use differing methods in achieving a safety-conscious work environment, and what may be necessary for some licensees is unnecessary for others. Under the approach discussed herein, however, a regulation could be written such that, while the Commission is prepared to take decisive action where licensees

have been unsuccessful, these actions are not invoked so long as licensees meet the basic criteria of a safety-conscious work environment.

Finally, while such a regulation might provide additional standardization and consistency where Commission action is necessary, the primary purpose would be to focus the licensee's attention in this area and reduce the need for Commission involvement in directing licensees' actions in this area. The intended effect of this rule would be for licensees (1) to become more aware of the importance the Commission places on establishing and maintaining a safety-conscious work environment, (2) to become more sensitive to indications of adverse trends emerging at their own facilities, and (3) to become more effective in taking actions to correct such trends and preserve the safety-conscious work environment before it deteriorates to a point that demands Commission intervention. This intention is consistent with the Commission's recognition, as presented in the May 1996 Policy Statement, that departures from a safety-conscious work environment are much more effectively corrected from within a licensee's organization than by the intervention of government or another outside agency.

### IV. Inclusion in the NRC Enforcement Policy or Issuance of a Separate Policy Statement

Another strategy toward standardizing the Commission's approach to this area would be to revise NUREG-1600, "General Statement of Policy and Procedures for NRC Actions" (generally known as the NRC Enforcement Policy), to include this standardized approach. While this strategy would not be binding on licensees in the sense of requiring, by regulation, a safety-conscious work environment, it would retain most of the other advantages of codification described above. This strategy would still successfully differentiate between licensees who perform well in this area and licensees who give cause for concern; it should heighten licensee awareness of the Commission's approach to evaluating licensee performance in this area; it should make licensees more sensitive to indicators of emerging adverse trends at their facilities; and it would provide licensees the opportunity to correct such trends before the safety-conscious work environment deteriorates to a point requiring Commission intervention.

The logic of including such an approach in the NRC Enforcement Policy is that it would contain standard criteria that, after consideration, could

<sup>2</sup> However, these symptoms may be advance indications, and any resulting decline in operational or safety performance may not emerge immediately. For this reason, the absence of operational or safety performance problems should not, by itself, be taken as assurance that the safety-conscious work environment has not deteriorated.

<sup>3</sup> Establishing and publishing a standardized approach clarifies the Commission's intention to respond to particular situations with particular actions. As a result of this clarification, any subsequent actions the Commission takes that are consistent with this expressed intention are less likely to be seen as arbitrary or prejudicially motivated, and therefore are less likely to be challenged. This logic is consistent with previous Commission experience in promulgating and implementing the *NRC Enforcement Policy* (NUREG 1600).

result in issuing orders to licensees. An alternative, however, would be to issue this approach in a separate Commission policy statement, to ensure that NRC monitoring of licensee performance in this area is separately administered and evaluated.

#### V. Explanation of the "Holding Period" Concept

Within the strategies being evaluated and discussed herein, the concept of a "holding period" warrants additional clarification. The holding period concept (sometimes also referred to as a "safe harbor" provision) was first introduced by the Allegation Review Team as a recommendation of NUREG-1499. Among other aspects, the Allegation Review Team recommended that, in applicable cases, the NRC Executive Director for Operations (or other senior NRC management) send a letter to senior licensee management reminding them of the Commission's policies on discrimination and the use of the holding period, and requesting a report to the NRC detailing the licensee's course of action. The holding period concept was carried forward to the Commission's May 1996 Policy Statement as a policy or action that a licensee might voluntarily choose to introduce; however, the Commission rejected the provision of sending a letter encouraging the licensee's use of the holding period in applicable cases. The Commission believes that several alternative strategies for mandating use of a holding period policy may merit reconsideration, particularly as an option for dealing with specific cases where a licensee's environment for raising safety concerns has significantly deteriorated.

In general, a licensee's holding period policy would provide that, when an employee complains that he or she has been discriminated against for engaging in protected activity, the licensee will maintain that employee's pay and benefits until the licensee has investigated the complaint, reconsidered the facts, negotiated with the employee, and informed the employee of a final decision on the matter. After the employee has been notified of the licensee's decision, the holding period would continue for an additional 2 weeks to allow a reasonable time for the employee to file with the DOL. If the employee files within that time, the licensee would continue the holding period until the DOL Area Office Director has made a finding based on the Area Office investigation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>In other words, the holding period would be in effect at least until the initial decision made under

As discussed in NUREG-1499, the holding period is designed to minimize onsite conflict (and any associated chilling effect) generated by the perception that an employee may have been retaliated against for raising concerns. In addition, the holding period may be used to demonstrate management support for maintaining a safety-conscious work environment. As stated in the Commission's May 1996 Policy Statement:

By this approach, management would be acknowledging that although a dispute exists as to whether discrimination occurred, in the interest of not discouraging other employees from raising concerns, the employee involved in the dispute will not lose pay and benefits while the action is being reconsidered or the dispute is being resolved.

In the past, both the staff recommendations and the Commission's policy have been to make the use of a holding period entirely voluntary. Even under the regulation or policy statement strategies discussed in Sections III and IV above, the use of a holding period (as well as other measures designed to promote a safety-conscious work environment) would be entirely voluntary for most licensees. However, in cases where the Commission determined that the licensee's safety-conscious work environment was deteriorating to the point of warranting additional NRC intervention, such a regulation or policy would provide that ordering the licensee's establishment of a holding period policy would be one of

the DOL process. Under Section 211 of the Energy Reorganization Act, the DOL only provides a temporarily effective remedy to the complainant (i.e., a reinstatement of pay and benefits) after an Administrative Law Judge's (ALJ's) adverse finding that discrimination has occurred. Based on a NUREG 1499 recommendation, the Commission is considering legislation, to be developed in coordination with the DOL, in which certain adjustments would be made to the current DOL process, in that the DOL would be provided additional time to conduct a more in-depth initial investigation, and a temporarily effective remedy could be provided to the complainant based on the initial investigation. Thus, if the holding period were extended to the conclusion of the initial DOL investigation, an employee who alleged discrimination for engaging in protected activity would not be removed from pay and benefits at any point in the subsequent investigation and adjudication process, so long as the DOL continued to find in the employee's favor.

It is important to explain that the Commission is not attempting to preempt the DOL's role in providing a remedy to the complainant. The purpose of the holding period is to neutralize the conflict in the workplace until the dispute is resolved without presumption as to the outcome, thereby minimizing the chilling effect on the rest of the workforce. The chilling effect can arise, in this situation, when other employees perceive that a fellow worker has been allegedly discriminated against for engaging in protected activity, and immediately placed at a disadvantage in pursuing a resolution by the loss of pay and benefits.

the options available at the discretion of the Commission.

Nothing in the application of such a Commission order or the resulting licensee holding period policy would mandate that a licensee employee must participate in or agree to the use of a holding period in a given case. In addition, for any case in which the Commission ordered the licensee to establish such a holding period policy, the licensee would continue to have the option as to whether a given complainant should be restored to his or her previous position, be assigned a new position, or be given administrative leave with pay and benefits. Furthermore, the Commission would continue to hold that, when a holding period policy has been established, the employer's action of not restoring a complainant to his or her previous position would not be considered an additional act of discrimination if the DOL AOD or Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) subsequently found in favor of the complainant, provided that (1) the employee had agreed to the provisions of the holding period, (2) pay and benefits were maintained, and (3) the employer restored the employee to the previous position without career prejudice upon a DOL finding of discrimination. Finally, the licensee bears responsibility for making legitimate personnel decisions, including termination or reassignment of an employee whose presence in the workplace could adversely affect safety. Neither the use of a holding period policy nor any other licensee action required by NRC order would relieve the licensee of this responsibility.<sup>5</sup> The function of the holding period is to counteract the chilling effect that may result when employees perceive that a fellow employee may have been terminated as the result of raising safety concerns, and thus placed at a financial disadvantage while seeking redress.

The Commission recognizes that the holding period concept has certain perceived drawbacks, as discussed by the Allegation Review Team in NUREG-1499. Some potential exists for abuse of a holding period policy, and it may be viewed as unfair to ask licensees to continue pay and benefits for employees whom the licensee believes are undeserving.<sup>6</sup> In addition, other factors

<sup>5</sup> However, if a dispute arose as to whether the licensee had a legitimate purpose (i.e., the employee maintained that the action was based on engaging in protected activity), the licensee would still be required to maintain pay and benefits. In such a case, administrative leave with pay and benefits might be the best option.

<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Sections III and IV, the holding period would only be one of several options that the

(such as licensee down-sizing actions) may contribute to the occurrence of a significant increase in complaints of discrimination. The Commission would give these and other factors careful consideration before requiring this approach for any specific licensee.<sup>7</sup> However, the Commission believes that where there has been a significant failure to maintain a safety-conscious work environment, these drawbacks, including any financial burden incurred by the licensee, would be clearly offset by the benefits of instilling a general perception that senior licensee management is serious about becoming involved, reconsidering the facts, finding a resolution, and minimizing the adverse impact on the complainant during these deliberations. Where a chilling effect would otherwise have resulted from a more confrontational licensee approach, these benefits are clear: in addition, the willingness of licensee management to work toward internal resolution of such a conflict may result in financial savings (1) by avoiding lengthy, expensive litigation in the case at hand and (2) by offsetting the possibility of additional cases that may result from a chilling effect. Most importantly, the avoidance of a chilling effect may result in having safety issues identified that might not otherwise have been raised.

#### VI. Discussion of Alternative Strategy in Requiring a Holding Period Policy and Periodic Site Surveys

The Commission has considered an alternative strategy, in which all licensees would be required to institute a holding period policy and periodic site surveys, rather than only those licensees who perform poorly in this area. This approach would not differentiate to the same extent between those licensees who perform well in this area and those who give cause for concern. However, this approach would ensure that all licensees periodically monitor their work environments to assess the degree to which employees feel free to raise safety concerns. In

NRC would have at its disposal under such a regulation or policy. Based on considering the specific attributes of a particular licensee's environment, the NRC might decide that requiring the use of a site-wide employee survey, an independent third-party oversight of the licensee's employee concern program, or some other measure should be required before, after, instead of, or in conjunction with a holding period policy.

<sup>7</sup>To be effective, the complainant should not be required to forfeit any pay or benefits received during the holding period if the DOL subsequently found that the licensee did not discriminate against the complainant. While such an approach could be perceived as unfair to the licensee, the Commission believes that such a burden is warranted in view of the benefit to the workplace environment.

addition, this approach would ensure that, for any situation in which an employee believes that he or she has been discriminated against for raising safety concerns, that employee would not be placed at a financial disadvantage (i.e., by the loss of pay and benefits) while pursuing a resolution. Under this approach, such an employee would continue to receive pay and benefits under the holding period even if the licensee had never before had such a complaint.

As stated earlier, the purpose of the holding period is to neutralize the conflict in the work environment until the dispute is resolved without presumption as to the outcome, thereby minimizing the chilling effect on the rest of the workforce. The chilling effect can arise when other employees perceive that a fellow worker has been discriminated against for engaging in protected activity, and then immediately placed at a disadvantage in pursuing a resolution by the loss of pay and benefits. By requiring all licensees to establish and implement a holding period policy, this alternative approach would attempt to offset this potential chilling effect on an industry-wide basis. Arguably, the benefits may not outweigh the costs in this approach, particularly in cases where the discrimination issue is a relatively isolated occurrence in an otherwise safety-conscious environment.

#### VII. Requests for Comments on the Approaches Discussed Herein

The Commission is considering various strategies that would clarify the responsibility of licensees to establish and maintain a safety-conscious work environment. The purpose of describing these strategies and posing certain questions is to illustrate the evaluation that has occurred to date, and to request public comment on the potential effectiveness of such actions, the advantages and disadvantages of the strategies described, and any suggestions on additions or deletions that would make these strategies more effective in achieving their stated purpose. Commenters should feel free to submit their responses to these questions anonymously; however, any information provided as to a commenter's background or degree of experience in this area will be helpful in analyzing and understanding the comments.

1. Should the Commission Proceed with Establishing a Standardized Approach to Ensuring That Licensees Establish and Maintain a Safety-Conscious Work Environment?

2. If Such an Approach Were Adopted, Would It Be Most Effective as: (a) A Proposed Rulemaking that Would Amend Part 50; (b) a revision to the NRC Enforcement Policy; or (c) a separately issued Commission policy statement?

3. What Additions or Deletions to the Draft Language of Such a Regulation or Policy, as Presented in Section IX, Below, Would Increase Its Effectiveness?

4. What Are the Advantages or Disadvantages of Implementing Such a Standardized Approach? (Comments are specifically requested as to whether the use of a holding period would achieve the objective of reducing the potential for a chilling effect in the work environment.)

5. What other means or indicators might the NRC use to evaluate licensee performance in this area other than the indicators mentioned in the language of Section IX, below?

6. What Would Be the Advantages or Disadvantages of Implementing the Alternative Approach to Requiring the Holding Period, as Described in Section VI, Above?

7. What Other Approaches Not Considered Here Would Be More Effective in Ensuring That Licensees Establish and Maintain a Safety-Conscious Work Environment?

#### VIII. Request for Regulatory Analysis Information

If a change of requirements is needed, the NRC will prepare a regulatory analysis to support any proposed or final rule. The analysis will examine the costs and benefits of regulatory alternatives available to the Commission.

The NRC requests public comment on the costs and benefits, normal business practices, new trends, and other information that should be considered in any such regulatory analysis. Comments may be submitted as indicated in the ADDRESSES heading.

#### IX. Specific Examples of Possible Language for a Regulation or Commission Policy

The NRC has developed language that may be applicable to a revision of Part 50 or (with necessary modifications) to a policy statement. This draft text reflects many of the issues as described. The NRC solicits comments on the following text, including the extent to which the text addresses the issues described. The NRC also solicits suggestions of alternative text that would address these issues.

*Proposed Language: Safety-Conscious Work Environment*

(a) Licensees shall establish and maintain a safety-conscious work environment in which employees are encouraged to raise safety and regulatory concerns, and where such concerns are promptly reviewed, given priority based on their potential safety significance, and appropriately resolved with timely feedback to the originator of the concern. Attributes of a safety-conscious work environment include:

- (1) A management attitude that promotes employee involvement and confidence in raising and resolving concerns;
- (2) A clearly communicated management policy that safety has the utmost priority, overriding, if necessary, the demands of production and project schedules;
- (3) A strong, independent quality assurance organization and program;
- (4) A training program that encourages a positive attitude toward safety;
- (5) A safety ethic at all levels that is characterized by an inherently questioning attitude, attention to detail, prevention of complacency, a commitment to excellence, and personal accountability in safety matters.

(b) When circumstances occur that could adversely impact the safety-conscious environment, or when conditions arise that indicate the potential emergence of an adverse trend in the safety-conscious work environment, the licensee shall take action as required to ensure that the safety-conscious environment is preserved. Indicators that may be considered as possible evidence of an emerging adverse trend include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Adverse findings by the Department of Labor or the NRC Office of Investigation (OI) concluding that discrimination has occurred against employees for engaging in protected activity, including a finding of the existence of a hostile work environment;
- (2) A significant increase in the rate (or a sustained high number) of allegations made to the NRC that licensee employees are being subjected to harassment and intimidation for engaging in protected activity;
- (3) A significant increase in the rate (or a sustained high number) of allegations made to the NRC concerning matters of safety or regulatory concern, particularly if accompanied by low usage or a decrease in use of the licensee's employee concern program (ECP) or other licensee channels for reporting safety and regulatory concerns;

(4) Other indications that the licensee's ECP or other programs for identifying and resolving safety and regulatory concerns are ineffective. Such indications might include: delays in or absence of feedback for concerns raised to the ECP; breaches of confidentiality for concerns raised to the ECP; the lack of effective evaluation, follow-up, or corrective action for concerns raised to the ECP or findings made by the licensee's QA organization; overall licensee ineffectiveness in identifying safety issues; the occurrence of repetitive or willful violations; a licensee emphasis on cost-cutting measures at the expense of safety considerations; and/or poor communication mechanisms within or among licensee groups.

(c) The presence of one or more of the indicators discussed in paragraph (b) of this section may or may not, in isolation, be considered evidence of deterioration in the licensee's safety-conscious work environment. Evaluation of the licensee's safety-conscious work environment should consider these indicators in the context of the overall work environment, including the presence or absence of other indicators, and the presence or absence of related licensee safety and performance issues.

(d) If, based on a review of indicators as discussed in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section, the Executive Director for Operations determines that the licensee has failed to establish and maintain a safety-conscious work environment as discussed in paragraph (a) of this section, the NRC at its discretion may require the licensee to take action. This action may include (but is not limited to) ordering one or more of the following:

- (1) Establishment of a formal employee concerns program (if one does not already exist);
- (2) Performance of an independent survey of the licensee's environment for raising safety and regulatory concerns, with periodic follow-up surveys to monitor change;
- (3) Establishment of an independent group for oversight of licensee performance in establishing and maintaining a safety-conscious work environment;
- (4) Establishment of a "holding period" policy, to be applied in cases where an employee of the licensee or its contractor registers a complaint of having been discriminated against for engaging in protected activity. The holding period policy requires that, when such an employee submits to the licensee a complaint that he or she has been discriminated against for engaging

in protected activity, the licensee will maintain that employee's pay and benefits until the licensee has investigated the complaint, reconsidered the facts, negotiated with the employee, and informed the employee of a final decision on the matter. After the licensee has informed the employee of its final decision, the holding period of continued pay and benefits will continue for an additional 2 weeks to allow a reasonable time for the employee to file a complaint of discrimination with the DOL. If, by the end of that 2-week period, the employee has filed with the DOL a complaint of discrimination for engaging in protected activity, the licensee will maintain the holding period of continued pay and benefits until the DOL has made a finding based on its initial investigation of the employee's complaint.

(5) Additional enforcement action pursuant to Subpart B of Part 2, including civil penalties.

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 19th day of February, 1996.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission,  
James Lieberman,

*Director, Office of Enforcement.*

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## **Biweekly Notice; Applications and Amendments to Facility Operating Licenses Involving No Significant Hazards Considerations**

### **I. Background**

Pursuant to Public Law 97-415, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (the Commission or NRC staff) is publishing this regular biweekly notice. Public Law 97-415 revised section 189 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended (the Act), to require the Commission to publish notice of any amendments issued, or proposed to be issued, under a new provision of section 189 of the Act. This provision grants the Commission the authority to issue and make immediately effective any amendment to an operating license upon a determination by the Commission that such amendment involves no significant hazards consideration, notwithstanding the pendency before the Commission of a request for a hearing from any person.

This biweekly notice includes all notices of amendments issued, or proposed to be issued from February 1, 1997, through February 13, 1997. The last biweekly notice was published on February 12, 1997 (62 FR 6567).