

NRC Security Enhancements – Background

While security of the nuclear facilities and materials the NRC regulates has always been a priority, the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, brought heightened scrutiny and spurred increasingly stringent security requirements. Today, five years after the attack, NRC-regulated nuclear facilities are among the most secure of the nation's critical infrastructure.

This heightened security is achieved in layers, with multiple approaches concurrently at work – just as safety in nuclear power plants is accomplished through duplicate back-up systems. To begin with, nuclear power plants are inherently secure, robust structures, built to withstand hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes. Additional security measures are in place: well trained and armed security guards; physical barriers, intrusion detection, and surveillance systems; and access controls.

Another layer of protection is in place for coordinating threat information and response. The NRC works closely with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), intelligence agencies, the Department of Defense and local law enforcement. These relationships ensure the NRC can act quickly on any threats that might affect its licensed facilities and allows effective emergency response from “outside the fence” should a serious terrorist attack occur.

While many of the details of the NRC's security requirements are withheld to avoid assisting potential adversaries, general information about the security enhancements of the past few years is available to the general public from a variety of sources, including NRC's Web site, NRC publications, and other publicly available sources.

Source: Nuclear Regulatory Commission <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/security-enhancements.html>

Nuclear Facility Safety

Over the past five years, the NRC has required many security enhancements at its licensed power reactors, decommissioning reactors, independent spent fuel storage installations, research and test reactors, uranium conversion facilities, gaseous diffusion plants and fuel fabrication facilities. The NRC directed facilities to upgrade their physical security plans, guard training and qualification plans, and contingency plans. These facilities now have, among other heightened measures:

- More patrols
- Stronger and more capable security forces
- Additional physical barriers
- Greater stand-off distances for vehicle checks
- More restrictive site access controls
- Enhanced emergency preparedness and response plans

The NRC has also significantly increased its oversight of security capabilities. In 2000, NRC inspectors spent about 40 staff-weeks a year at nuclear power plants directly inspecting security (excluding special “force-on-force inspections”). By 2003, this inspection effort had increased five-fold to 205 staff-weeks. These inspections specifically focused on the implementation of “compensatory measures” the NRC required after the 2001 attacks to address the new threat environment. In 2004, the NRC implemented a new “baseline inspection program” for security and by 2005, direct staff inspections at nuclear power plants had increased further to about 400 staff-weeks a year.

Source: Nuclear Regulatory Commission <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/security-enhancements.html>

Security Exercises

The NRC sets the rules and then tests the security response at nuclear power facilities with security performance evaluations often called “force-on-force” exercises. In these exercises, a specially trained mock adversary force “attacks” the facility. In 2004, the NRC implemented more realistic force-on-force exercises on a more aggressive schedule that tests facilities more frequently (at least every 3 years) and under more challenging expectations. Since late 2004, nearly 40 of these full-scale exercises have been conducted under this enhanced evaluation program and a report on the program was sent to Congress in July 2006. Efforts are ongoing to further enhance realism and “lessons learned” from these exercises. For example, the NRC is working with the nuclear industry, State and local responders, and DHS to include more security-based event scenarios into emergency preparedness drills and exercises. The NRC is also considering the use of a technically advanced simulation tool used by the Department of Defense to simulate joint military exercises. This technology can help the NRC and its nuclear plants analyze and improve physical security by modeling different attack scenarios on specific facilities.

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Security Personnel

One of the most important components of the security programs at nuclear power facilities is the quality of its guard force. Over the past five years, the NRC has required power plants to add more training and higher qualification standards for security personnel, while substantially increasing the number of officers on the force. Plant security officers, for example, must now be trained under more realistic conditions and against moving targets. In order to minimize security personnel fatigue and ensure a vigilant and effective guard force, the NRC has instituted additional fitness-for-duty requirements and work hours controls.

In accordance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the NRC has also strengthened requirements for fingerprinting and background checks of certain plant employees. On January 4, 2006, the NRC entered into an agreement with the federal government's Terrorist Screening Center to review records of individuals with unescorted access to nuclear power reactor facilities. This collaborative effort automated and streamlined the collection and dissemination of information used to determine the trustworthiness of individuals who have unescorted access to certain vital areas of nuclear power plants. It also enhances the process of identifying anyone with access to these areas who may pose a threat to national security.

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Research

Research has always played a large part in supporting the NRC's safety mission. Throughout the past five years, changes in the threat environment and improvements in technology that allow more sophisticated analyses, have accelerated the pace of power plant research and security studies. For example, the NRC initiated a security and engineering review based on the September 11th events. The review looked at what might happen if terrorists used an aircraft to attack a nuclear power plant. The NRC also assessed the potential consequences of other types of terrorist attacks. National experts from Department of Energy (DOE) laboratories used state-of-the-art experiments and structural and fire analyses to assist the NRC.

While the details are classified, the studies confirm that the plants are robust, and the likelihood of a radioactive release affecting public health and safety is low. Another study analyzed the ability of nuclear power plants to withstand damage to, or loss of, large areas of the plant caused by a range of postulated attacks that could result in large fires and explosions. After examining a number of emergency scenarios involving operating reactors, spent fuel pools and dry-cask storage installations, the NRC has concluded that the existing planning basis used to develop nuclear power plant emergency plans remains valid and is confident that the public near those facilities can be adequately protected should an attack occur. As part of these analyses, enhancements were identified and the NRC ordered changes at nuclear power plants. Moreover, based on insights from these studies, industry best practices, and lessons-learned from the response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, additional mitigating capabilities have been put in place at all nuclear power plants.

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Cyber Security

While the September 11 attacks didn't have a "cyber" component, it is no secret that cyber security is a growing and serious issue. The NRC has already issued a series of advisories and orders requiring nuclear power plants to take certain actions, including enhancing protection of their computer systems. Several new rulemakings are proposing further cyber security requirements. One proposed rule would require nuclear power plants to implement strategies to protect computer systems, detect cyber attacks, and isolate and neutralize cyber intruders. However, it is important to note that computer systems that help operate the reactors and other power reactor safety equipment are isolated from the internet to protect against outside intrusion. As suggested by the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the Commission is also considering adding a cyber threat component to the DBT. In addition, the NRC routinely interacts with the DHS's National Cyber Security Division to coordinate federal cyber security activities in the nuclear sector.

Source: Nuclear Regulatory Commission <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/security-enhancements.html>

Coordination and Communications

The NRC doesn't stand alone in protecting its licensees. The NRC and DHS coordinate resources and work together in today's threat environment. One tangible example is the recently issued National Infrastructure Protection Plan, which, when coupled with the Nuclear Sector Specific Plan and National Response Plan, facilitates the sharing of information and provides for a coordinated, comprehensive response to threats and events. Federally integrated response is also illustrated by DHS's decision to begin infrastructure reviews in the nuclear sector, making it a model for future reviews of security at other critical industries. The Comprehensive Review initiative (a DHS-led program to evaluate national critical infrastructure protection capabilities) integrates a full range of security, law enforcement and emergency preparedness professionals to identify strengths and potential weaknesses of the nation's critical infrastructure and key resources. Nuclear power plants were identified as an initial area for review because of the high level of planning already in place, and all plants have either been reviewed or are scheduled to be reviewed in the next year.

The NRC has also developed a Threat Advisory and Protective Measures System that corresponds to the color-coded Homeland Security Advisory System. The NRC system identifies specific actions to be considered by NRC licensees for each threat level to counter projected terrorist threats. If a credible threat emerges against a specific nuclear facility, additional protective measures may be mandated even without a change in the overall threat level.

The timely sharing of accurate information among the NRC, other federal agencies and the nuclear industry is critical to preventing or mitigating the effects of terrorist attacks. NRC staffs are assigned to the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, the National Counterterrorism Center and the DHS Infrastructure Protection Office to support the integrated assessment of security-related information. The NRC Operations Center, located in the agency's headquarters in Rockville, Md., provides an around-the-clock conduit for disseminating information and coordinating response, and NRC's highly-trained specialists review intelligence and threat-related information from a range of sources in order to assess suspicious activity related to its licensees. Secure communications systems also allow the NRC to communicate with nuclear regulators in other countries.

The NRC has always been committed to open communication with the public. However, since September 11th, the NRC realized that security-related information it routinely made public could possibly aid potential adversaries seeking to steal or divert radioactive materials or attack or sabotage a nuclear power plant. With that reality, NRC revised its information dissemination policy, and the public is provided only limited information on regulatory decisions or actions involving security inspection, assessment or enforcement. The Commission regularly reassesses this policy and in mid-2006 began making certain results of its security inspection program for nuclear power plants available to the public. The NRC has also initiated a series of annual public meetings on security and emergency

preparedness, allowing the flow of some information to external stakeholders and the public without jeopardizing national security.

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