

## Nuclear Regulatory Commission

## §61.7

accept, the use of electronic signatures, and the treatment of nonpublic information.

[73 FR 5725, Jan. 31, 2008, as amended at 74 FR 62683, Dec. 1, 2009]

### §61.5 Interpretations.

Except as specifically authorized by the Commission in writing, no interpretation of the meaning of the regulations in this part by any officer or employee of the Commission other than a written interpretation by the General Counsel will be considered binding upon the Commission.

### §61.6 Exemptions.

The Commission may, upon application by any interested person, or upon its own initiative, grant any exemption from the requirements of the regulations in this part as it determines is authorized by law, will not endanger life or property or the common defense and security, and is otherwise in the public interest.

### §61.7 Concepts.

(a) *The disposal facility.* (1) Part 61 is intended to apply to land disposal of radioactive waste and not to other methods such as sea or extraterrestrial disposal. Part 61 contains procedural requirements and performance objectives applicable to any method of land disposal. It contains specific technical requirements for near-surface disposal of radioactive waste, a subset of land disposal, which involves disposal in the uppermost portion of the earth, approximately 30 meters. Near-surface disposal includes disposal in engineered facilities which may be built totally or partially above-grade provided that such facilities have protective earthen covers. Near-surface disposal does not include disposal facilities which are partially or fully above-grade with no protective earthen cover, which are referred to as "above-ground disposal." Burial deeper than 30 meters may also be satisfactory. Technical requirements for alternative methods may be added in the future.

(2) Near-surface disposal of radioactive waste takes place at a near-surface disposal facility, which includes all of the land and buildings necessary to carry out the disposal. The disposal

site is that portion of the facility which is used for disposal of waste and consists of disposal units and a buffer zone. A disposal unit is a discrete portion of the disposal site into which waste is placed for disposal. For near-surface disposal, the disposal unit is usually a trench. A buffer zone is a portion of the disposal site that is controlled by the licensee and that lies under the site and between the boundary of the disposal site and any disposal unit. It provides controlled space to establish monitoring locations which are intended to provide an early warning of radionuclide movement, and to take mitigative measures if needed. In choosing a disposal site, site characteristics should be considered in terms of the indefinite future and evaluated for at least a 500-year timeframe.

(b) *Waste classification and near-surface disposal.* (1) Disposal of radioactive waste in near-surface disposal facilities has the following safety objectives: protection of the general population from releases of radioactivity, protection of individuals from inadvertent intrusion, and protection of individuals during operations. A fourth objective is to ensure stability of the site after closure.

(2) A cornerstone of the system is stability—stability of the waste and the disposal site so that once emplaced and covered, the access of water to the waste can be minimized. Migration of radionuclides is thus minimized, long-term active maintenance can be avoided, and potential exposures to intruders reduced. While stability is a desirable characteristic for all waste much radioactive waste does not contain sufficient amounts of radionuclides to be of great concern from these standpoints; this waste, however, tends to be unstable, such as ordinary trash type wastes. If mixed with the higher activity waste, their deterioration could lead to failure of the system and permit water to penetrate the disposal unit and cause problems with the higher activity waste. Therefore, in order to avoid placing requirements for a stable waste form on relatively innocuous waste, these wastes have been classed as Class A waste. The Class A waste will be disposed of in separate disposal units at the disposal site. However,

Class A waste that is stable may be mixed with other classes of waste. Those higher activity wastes that should be stable for proper disposal are classed as Class B and C waste. To the extent that it is practicable, Class B and C waste forms or containers should be designed to be stable, *i.e.*, maintain gross physical properties and identity, over 300 years. For certain radionuclides prone to migration, a maximum disposal site inventory based on the characteristics of the disposal site may be established to limit potential exposure.

(3) It is possible but unlikely that persons might occupy the site in the future and engage in normal pursuits without knowing that they were receiving radiation exposure. These persons are referred to as inadvertent intruders. Protection of such intruders can involve two principal controls: institutional control over the site after operations by the site owner to ensure that no such occupation or improper use of the site occurs; or, designating which waste could present an unacceptable risk to an intruder, and disposing of this waste in a manner that provides some form of intruder barrier that is intended to prevent contact with the waste. This regulation incorporates both types of protective controls.

(4) Institutional control of access to the site is required for up to 100 years. This permits the disposal of Class A and Class B waste without special provisions for intrusion protection, since these classes of waste contain types and quantities of radioisotopes that will decay during the 100-year period and will present an acceptable hazard to an intruder. The government landowner administering the active institutional control program has flexibility in controlling site access which may include allowing productive uses of the land provided the integrity and long-term performance of the site are not affected.

(5) Waste that will not decay to levels which present an acceptable hazard to an intruder within 100 years is designated as Class C waste. This waste is disposed of at a greater depth than the other classes of waste so that subsequent surface activities by an intruder will not disturb the waste. Where site

conditions prevent deeper disposal, intruder barriers such as concrete covers may be used. The effective life of these intruder barriers should be 500 years. A maximum concentration of radionuclides is specified for all wastes so that at the end of the 500 year period, remaining radioactivity will be at a level that does not pose an unacceptable hazard to an intruder or public health and safety. Waste with concentrations above these limits is generally unacceptable for near-surface disposal. There may be some instances where waste with concentrations greater than permitted for Class C would be acceptable for near-surface disposal with special processing or design. These will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Class C waste must also be stable.

(c) *The licensing process.* (1) During the preoperational phase, the potential applicant goes through a process of disposal site selection by selecting a region of interest, examining a number of possible disposal sites within the area of interest and narrowing the choice to the proposed site. Through a detailed investigation of the disposal site characteristics the potential applicant obtains data on which to base an analysis of the disposal site's suitability. Along with these data and analyses, the applicant submits other more general information to the Commission in the form of an application for a license for land disposal. The Commission's review of the application is in accordance with administrative procedures established by rule and may involve participation by affected State governments or Indian tribes. While the proposed disposal site must be owned by a State or the Federal government before the Commission will issue a license, it may be privately owned during the preoperational phase if suitable arrangements have been made with a State or the Federal government to take ownership in fee of the land before the license is issued.

(2) During the operational phase, the licensee carries out disposal activities in accordance with the requirements of this regulation and any conditions on the license. Periodically, the authority to conduct the above ground operations and dispose of waste will be subject to

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a license renewal, at which time the operating history will be reviewed and a decision made to permit or deny continued operation. When disposal operations are to cease, the licensee applies for an amendment to his license to permit site closure. After final review of the licensee's site closure and stabilization plan, the Commission may approve the final activities necessary to prepare the disposal site so that ongoing active maintenance of the site is not required during the period of institutional control.

(3) During the period when the final site closure and stabilization activities are being carried out, the licensee is in a disposal site closure phase. Following that, for a period of 5 years, the licensee must remain at the disposal site for a period of post-closure observation and maintenance to assure that the disposal site is stable and ready for institutional control. The Commission may approve shorter or require longer periods if conditions warrant. At the end of this period, the licensee applies for a license transfer to the disposal site owner.

(4) After a finding of satisfactory disposal site closure, the Commission will transfer the license to the State or Federal government that owns the disposal site. If the Department of Energy is the Federal agency administering the land on behalf of the Federal government the license will be terminated because the Commission lacks regulatory authority over the Department for this activity. Under the conditions of the transferred license, the owner will carry out a program of monitoring to assure continued satisfactory disposal site performance, physical surveillance to restrict access to the site and carry out minor custodial activities. During this period, productive uses of the land might be permitted if those uses do not affect the stability of the site and its ability to meet the performance objectives. At the end of the prescribed period of institutional control, the license will be terminated by the Commission.

[47 FR 57463, Dec. 27, 1982, as amended at 58 FR 33891, June 22, 1993]

### § 61.8 Information collection requirements: OMB approval.

(a) The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has submitted the information collection requirements contained in this part to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for approval as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*). The NRC may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. OMB has approved the information collection requirements contained in this part under control number 3150-0135.

(b) The approved information collection requirements contained in this Part appear in §§ 61.3, 61.6, 61.9, 61.10, 61.11, 61.12, 61.13, 61.14, 61.15, 61.16, 61.20, 61.22, 61.24, 61.26, 61.27, 61.28, 61.30, 61.31, 61.32, 61.53, 61.55, 61.57, 61.58, 61.61, 61.62, 61.63, 61.72, and 61.80.

(c) In § 61.32, Form N-71 and associated forms are approved under control number 3150-0056, and DOC/NRC Forms AP-1, AP-A, and associated forms are approved under control numbers 0694-0135.

[58 FR 33891, June 22, 1993, as amended at 62 FR 52188, Oct. 6, 1997; 73 FR 78606, Dec. 23, 2008]

### § 61.9 Employee protection.

(a) Discrimination by a Commission licensee, an applicant for a Commission license, or a contractor or subcontractor of a Commission licensee or applicant against an employee for engaging in certain protected activities is prohibited. Discrimination includes discharge and other actions that relate to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment. The protected activities are established in section 211 of the Energy Reorganization Act of 1974, as amended, and in general are related to the administration or enforcement of a requirement imposed under the Atomic Energy Act or the Energy Reorganization Act.

(1) The protected activities include but are not limited to: