Accordingly, the NRC concludes that there are no significant environmental impacts associated with the proposed action.

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

As an alternative to the proposed action, the staff considered denial of the proposed action (*i.e.*, the ''no-action'' alternative). Denial of the application would result in no change in current environmental impacts. The environmental impacts of the proposed action and the alternative action are similar.

Alternative Use of Resources

This action does not involve the use of any resources not previously considered in the Final Environmental Statement for the Oconee Nuclear Station, Units 1, 2, and 3.

Agencies and Persons Consulted

In accordance with its stated policy, on March 14, 2000, the staff consulted with the South Carolina State official, Mr. Virgil L. Autry of the Division of Radiological Waste Management, Bureau of Land and Waste Management, Department of Health and Environmental Control, regarding the environmental impact of the proposed action. The State official had no comments.

Finding of No Significant Impact

On the basis of the environmental assessment, the NRC concludes that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, the NRC has determined not to prepare an environmental impact statement for the proposed action.

For further details with respect to the proposed action, see the licensee's letter dated September 15, 1999, which is available for public inspection at the Commission's Public Document Room, The Gelman Building, 2120 L Street, NW., Washington, DC. Publically available records are accessible electronically from the ADAMS Public Library component on the NRC Web site, *http://www.nrc.gov* (the Electronic Reading Room).

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 17th day of March 2000.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Richard L. Emch, Jr.,

Section Chief, Section 1, Project Directorate II, Division of Licensing Project Management, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation.

[FR Doc. 00–7237 Filed 3–22–00; 8:45 am]

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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

[Docket No. 72–13]

Entergy Operations, Inc., Arkansas Nuclear One Power Plant; Issuance of Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact Regarding the Proposed Exemption From Certain Requirements of 10 CFR Part 72

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC or Commission) is considering issuance of an exemption, pursuant to 10 CFR 72.7, from the provisions of 10 CFR 72.212(a)(2) and 72.214 to Entergy Operations, Inc. (Entergy). The exemption would allow Entergy to store burnable poison rod assemblies (BPRAs) in Ventilated Storage Cask–24 (VSC–24) systems at the Arkansas Nuclear One (ANO) Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation (ISFSI).

Environmental Assessment (EA)

Identification of Proposed Action

By letter dated February 3, 2000, Entergy requested an extension to a previous exemption granted to Entergy by NRC on April 9, 1999, from the requirements of 10 CFR 72.12(a)(2) and 72.214 to store BPRAs in VSC–24s at the ANO ISFSI. NRC published an Environmental Assessment and Finding Of No Significant Impact for the previous exemption request in the **Federal Register** (64 FR 13611, March 19, 1999). The April 9, 1999, NRC letter placed conditions on the exemption, including that no more than four VSC–24s containing BPRAs could be loaded and the loading of these four VSC–24s would need to be accomplished prior to September 1999. These conditions were based on (1) ANO's request to load four casks prior to the September refuel outage to regain full core offload reserves in the Unit 1 spent fuel pool and (2) NRC's expectation of completion of a rulemaking, under 10 CFR 72.214 before the next ANO refueling outage, which would amend the Certificate of Compliance (CoC) for the VSC–24 cask to permit storage of spent fuel containing BPRAs (64 FR 51187, September 22, 1999).

The 10 CFR 72.124 rulemaking is not completed and the ANO, Unit 1, spent fuel pool has again lost full core offload reserves. ANO must load three VSC–24s with fuel containing BPRAs to regain full core offload reserves prior to the next refueling outage, scheduled for Spring 2000.

ANO is a general licensee, authorized by NRC to use spent fuel storage casks approved under 10 CFR Part 72, Subpart K. ANO is using the VSC–24 design approved by NRC under CoC No. 1007 to store spent fuel at the ISFSI. However, CoC No. 1007 does not authorize the storage of BPRAs.

The ISFSI is located 6 miles west-northwest of Russellville, Arkansas, on the ANO Power Plant site. The ANO ISFSI is an existing facility constructed for interim dry storage of spent ANO nuclear fuel.

By exempting ANO from 10 CFR 72.212(a)(2) and 72.214, ANO will be authorized to use its general license to store spent fuel with BPRAs in casks approved under part 72, as exempted, until the 10 CFR 72.214 rulemaking is complete. The proposed action before the Commission is whether to grant this exemption under 10 CFR 72.7.

On December 30, 1998, the cask designer, Sierra Nuclear Corporation (SNC), submitted a Certificate of Compliance amendment request to NRC to address the storage of Babcock and Wilcox (B&W) 15x15 fuel with BPRAs. The NRC staff has reviewed the application and determined that storing B&W 15x15 fuel with BPRAs in the VSC–24 would have minimal impact on the design basis and would not be inimical to public health and safety.

Need for the Proposed Action

ANO has lost full core offload reserves in the Unit 1 spent fuel pool and Unit 1 is scheduled for a refueling outage in Spring 2000. ANO must load three VSC–24s with fuel containing BPRAs to regain full core offload reserves.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

The potential environmental impact of using the VSC–24 system was initially presented in the EA for the Final Rule to add the VSC–24 to the list of approved spent fuel storage casks in 10 CFR 72.214 (58 FR 17948 (1993)). Furthermore, each general licensee must assess the environmental impacts of the specific ISFSI in accordance with the requirements of 10 CFR 72.212(b)(2)(iii). This section requires the general licensee to perform written evaluations to demonstrate compliance with the environmental requirements of 10 CFR 72.104, ''Criteria for radioactive materials in effluents and direct radiation from an ISFSI or MRS [Monitored Retrievable Storage Installation].''

VSC–24s are designed to mitigate the effects of design basis accidents that could occur during storage. Design basis accidents account for human-induced events and the most severe natural

phenomena reported for the site and surrounding area. Postulated accidents analyzed for an ISFSI include tornado winds and tornado generated missiles, design basis earthquake, design basis flood, accidental cask drop, lightening effects, fire, explosions, and other incidents.

Special cask design features include a double-closure welded steel multi-assembly sealed basket (MSB) made from SA–516 Gr 70 pressure vessel steel to contain the spent fuel. This MSB is up to 181-inches long, 62.5 inches in diameter, with 1.0-inch thick walls. The MSB is placed inside of a ventilated Concrete Cask (VCC) and positioned for storage on the concrete ISFSI pad. The VCC is up to 213-inches long, 132 inches in diameter, and 31.75-inches thick. The VCC wall consists of a 1.75-inch thick steel inner liner surrounded by reinforced concrete and steel ducts for a passive ventilation system.

Considering the specific design requirements for each accident condition, the design of the cask would prevent loss of containment, shielding, and criticality control. Without the loss of either containment, shielding, or criticality control, the risk to public health and safety is not compromised.

Storage of B&W 15x15 fuel containing BPRAs would increase the maximum potential cask does rates by no or than 13 percent at any location on a loaded VSC–24 system. For a VSC–24 loaded with fuel containing BPRAs, the highest dose would be found at the top center of the cask. This dose was calculated to increase from 30 mrem/hr without BPRAs to 32.2 mrem/hr with BPRAs. The occupational exposure is not significantly increased and off-site dose rates remain well within the 10 CFR Part 20 limits. Therefore, the proposed action now under consideration would not change the potential environmental effects assessed in the initial rulemaking (58 FR 17948).

Therefore, the staff has determined that there is no reduction in the safety margin nor significant environmental impacts as a result of storing B&W 15×15 fuel with BPRAs in the VSC–24 system.

Alternative to the Proposed Action

The staff evaluated other alternatives involving removal of the BPRAs from the fuel assemblies and found that these alternatives produced a greater occupational exposure and an increased environmental impact as a result of handling the BPRAs separately as low-level waste. The alternative to the proposed action would be to deny approval of the exemption and, therefore, require ANO to disassemble and store the BPRAs as low-level waste in separate containers.

Agencies and Persons Consulted

On February 11, 2000, Bernard Bevill from the Division of Radiation Control and Emergency Management, Arkansas Department of Health, was contacted about the EA for the proposed action and had no concerns.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The environmental impacts of the proposed action have been reviewed in accordance with the requirements set forth in 10 CFR part 51. Based upon the foregoing EA, the Commission finds that the proposed action of granting an exemption from 10 CFR 72.212(a)(2) and 72.214 so that ANO may store B&W 15x15 fuel containing BPRAs in VSC–24s will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, the Commission has determined not to prepare an environmental impact statement for the proposed exemption.

For further details with respect to this exemption request, see the Entergy exemption request dated February 3, 2000, which is docketed under 10 CFR part 72, Docket No. 72–13. The exemption request is available for public inspection at the Commission's Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20555 and accessible electronically through the ''ADAMS'' Public Electronic Reading Room link at the NRC Web site (http://www.nrc.gov/nrc/reference.html).

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 13th day of May 2000.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

E. Willliam Brach,

Director, Spent Fuel Project Office, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards.

[FR Doc. 00–7243 Filed 3–22–00; 8:45 am]

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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

[Docket Nos. 50–321 and 50–366]

Southern Nuclear Operating Company; Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2; Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is considering issuance of amendments to Facility Operating License Nos. DPR–57 and NFP–5, issued to Southern Nuclear Operating Company, Inc., *et al.* (the licensee), for operation of the Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2, located in Appling County, Georgia.

Environmental Assessment

Identification of the Proposed Action

The proposed action would allow an increase in the storage capacity of Unit 1's spent fuel pool (SFP) from 3181 to 3349 and of Unit 2's SFP from 2845 to 2933. This will be accomplished by placing a single high density storage rack containing 168 storage spaces in an 8 by 21 array in the Contaminated Equipment Storage Area (CESA) of each unit's pool where currently no racks exist. Accordingly, the Hatch 1 SFP licensed storage capacity will increase to a total of 3349 (3181 + 168) fuel assemblies. However, the Hatch 2 SFP licensed storage capacity will only increase to a total of 2933 (2845 + 88) fuel assemblies because the new Holtec rack will ''replace'' the four original standard type storage racks capable of storing 80 assemblies that were planned for installation in the Unit 2 CESA but they were, in fact, never installed.

The proposed action is in accordance with the licensee's application for amendment dated April 6, 1999.

The Need for the Proposed Action

Long term plans for spent fuel storage at Hatch include utilization of dry cask storage at a separate facility located on the plant site. However, due to uncertainties in cask fabrication and procurement and cask loading, the licensee is proposing to increase the storage capacity of the SFPs. The increased storage capacity of one SFP will allow a full core discharge from one unit after the next refueling outage. The increased storage capacity of the second SFP will allow a full core discharge of the second unit after its next refueling outage.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

Solid Radioactive Wastes

The necessity for pool filtration resin replacement is determined by the requirement for water clarity, and the resin is normally expected to be changed about once a year. The licensee does not expect the resin change-out frequency of the SFP purification system to be permanently increased as a result of the expanded storage capacity. Overall, the licensee concludes that the additional fuel storage made available by the increased storage capacity will not result in a significant change in the generation of solid radioactive waste.

Occupational Radiation Exposure

The licensee plans to utilize the Contaminated Equipment Storage Area in each unit's SFP where racks do not