

COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP

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NRC PUBLISHES PROPOSED RULEMAKING TO PROTECT REACTORS AGAINST AIR ATTACKS AND 9/11 NUMBER OF TERRORISTS

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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission today published in the Federal Register a proposal to upgrade security requirements for U.S. nuclear reactors to be able to meet a threat on a par with that seen on 9/11.

In particular, the proposed rule changes would require for the first time protection of nuclear plants against air attack, and would require protections against ground attacks by terrorists in numbers and sophistication at least equal to those seen on 9/11. Current longstanding NRC regulations require no protection against air attack and only a small group of ground attackers.

The proposed action is based on a Petition for Rulemaking submitted by the Committee to Bridge the Gap (CBG), a nuclear policy organization that has for a quarter of a century been urging the NRC to upgrade security measures at domestic reactors. A decade ago CBG was instrumental in getting the NRC to require protection of nuclear plants against truck bombs and remove weapons-grade uranium from research reactors.

The CBG rulemaking petition proposes prompt construction of "Beamhenge" shields at stand-off distances from key reactor structures. Made of I-beams and steel or kevlar cabling and netting, "Beamhenge" would protect reactors by having a plane crash into the shield rather than the reactor, spent fuel pool, or key support facilities.

The proposal also involves increasing the "design basis threat" (DBT) -- the maximum attack a reactor must be able to withstand -- to at least the 19 attackers in 4 teams, with a high level of sophistication, planning, and willingness to die seen on 9/11. Current NRC regulations -- unchanged since 9/11 -- only require protection against 3 attackers acting as a single team, with the possible assistance of 1 insider, and using weapons only up to automatic rifles.

NRC last year issued "orders" that increased the DBT somewhat, but because the regulations themselves have not been changed and there was no opportunity for public input, the orders have been challenged in court and NRC has committed to the court to conduct rulemaking proceedings. Additionally, the Commission has publicly conceded that even the orders do not increase the DBT to 9/11 levels in terms of numbers of attackers, nor require protection against air attack.

The CBG rulemaking petition, as published by NRC in the Federal Register today, would do precisely that.

The NRC Federal Register notice can be found at
<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/06jun20041800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2004/pdf/04-24803.pdf>

The full rulemaking petition can be found at
http://ruleforum.llnl.gov/cgi-bin/library?source=*&library=ctbg_prm_lib&file=*&st=petitions-a

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