Plan to boost states’ role in spent-fuel shipments is welcome, but more involvement still sought

By Lisa Janairo

Friday, August 19, 2011 at 04:09 PM

Proposed rules by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) would place more emphasis on the role of states in ensuring the security of shipments of spent nuclear fuel.

These rules, as well as other security issues involving spent-fuel shipments through the region, were prominent on the spring meeting agenda of the CSG Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee. This group of state officials and legislators met in May in conjunction with the annual meeting of the U.S. Department of Energy’s National Transportation Stakeholders Forum (NTSF).

Last fall, the NRC proposed amending the measures that licensees must follow to minimize the possibility of sabotage involving shipments and also to make it easier to locate and recover any shipments that might be hijacked by terrorists.

Currently, licensees are required to notify governors or their designees in advance of spent-fuel shipments through their states. The proposed rule would expand state involvement by requiring licensees to coordinate with states on ways to minimize intermediate stops and delays and to identify suitable routes and safe parking areas for shipments. Licensees would also work with state law enforcement to arrange for escorts.

The CSG committee formally submitted comments on the proposed rule on April 11.

It has applauded the addition of a new pre-planning and coordination section; however, based on the Midwest’s experience with DOE shipments, committee members are recommending that the NRC expand upon the requirement to ensure that states are involved early and often in the shipment planning process. They suggested that the NRC consult the “Planning Guide for Shipments of Radioactive Materials Through the Midwestern States” (a publication of CSG Midwest) for an example of the appropriate time line for planning shipments with optimal state involvement.

In addition to discussing the NRC’s proposed rules at its spring meeting, the CSG committee examined a recent situation involving the sharing of security-related information for ongoing shipments of transuranic waste to the DOE’s Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico.

WIPP is the world’s only operating geologic repository for radioactive waste and is used to dispose of transuranic waste resulting from the production of nuclear weapons.
The Midwest is affected by transuranic waste shipments from Argonne National Laboratory near Chicago, and had three shipments pass through it in June from a small site in New York. Funding permitting, the CSG committee will hold its fall meeting in either New Mexico or Texas so that committee members can tour the WIPP site.

Brief written by senior policy analyst Lisa Janairo, who coordinates the activities of the Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee. This CSG Midwest committee works with the U.S. Department of Energy to resolve issues related to the transport of radioactive waste and materials. Lisa can be reached at ljanairo@csg.org. The committee’s co-chairs are Paul Schmidt of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and Tim Runyon of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency.

Tags:
- CSG Midwest
- Stateline Midwest
- Policy Area
- Energy
- Power Generation
- Nuclear
- Policy Area
- Environment
- Waste
- Nuclear Waste