



NRC NEWS

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NRC ASKS NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES TO STUDY CANCER RISK IN POPULATIONS LIVING NEAR NUCLEAR POWER FACILITIES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has asked the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to perform a state-of-the-art study on cancer risk for populations surrounding nuclear power facilities. The NRC has accepted an invitation from the Nuclear and Radiation Studies Board of the NAS to discuss the request at the board's public meeting on April 26; the meeting agenda will be posted at www.nationalacademies.org/nrsb. The NRC and the NAS will finalize administrative details through the spring so that the study can begin this summer.

“We’re pleased the Academy is interested in taking on this important study,” said Brian Sheron, Director of the NRC’s Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research. “Their broad range of medical and scientific experts can give us the best available analysis of the complex issues involved in discussing cancer risk and commercial nuclear power plants.”

The NAS is a non-governmental organization chartered by the U.S. Congress to advise the nation on issues of science, technology, and medicine. Through the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, it carries out studies independently of the government using processes designed to promote transparency, objectivity, and technical rigor. More information on its methods for performing studies is available at <http://www.nationalacademies.org/studycommitteprocess.pdf>.

The NRC is seeking the expertise of the NAS to update the 1990 U.S. National Institutes of Health - National Cancer Institute (NCI) report, “Cancer in Populations Living Near Nuclear Facilities” (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/nuclear-facilities>). The staff uses the NCI report as a primary resource when communicating with the public about cancer mortality risk in counties that contain or are adjacent to nuclear power facilities. In the new study, the NRC is also interested in having the NAS evaluate cancer diagnosis rates, as well as exploring how to divide the study areas around the facilities into geographical units smaller than the counties used in the NCI report.

The NCI report studied more than 900,000 cancer deaths from 1950–1984, using mortality records collected from counties that contain nuclear facilities. The researchers evaluated changes in mortality rates for 16 types of cancer in these counties from 1950 until each

facility began operation, up until 1982. Cancer diagnosis information was only available for four facilities located in Iowa and Connecticut, due to the lack of this type of data being collected. The NCI report showed no increased risk of death from cancer for people living in the 107 U.S. counties containing or closely adjacent to 62 nuclear facilities, including all of the nuclear power reactors operational before 1982.

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