



Nuclear watchdog groups say that an internal report by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on fire safety at nuclear plants shows that regulators don't have enough information to know whether its new fire rules will ensure safety.

The NRC, in response, said the new fire plan was the product of years of extensive research, would improve safety and was ready to use. The first plant approved to use the new regulations is Progress Energy's Harris nuclear plant in North Carolina.

Safety and cost are key issues that must be addressed as utilities decide whether to move ahead with a new round of nuclear plant construction. Fire safety at complex nuclear plants is crucial because fire is a large factor in the risk of a meltdown.

The NRC revised its fire safety rules for commercial reactors after a fire in 1975 at the Browns Ferry plant in Alabama threatened the plant's ability to shut down. The nation's nuclear plants have many different designs, and they had difficulty meeting the requirements for fire barriers and other elements of the existing fire protection plan.

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