

Streamlining the Regulatory Process

The Bush administration has tried to encourage a nuclear energy revival by persuading the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to streamline its process for evaluating new plant designs. In brief:



1. Design certification

Nuclear plant designs are subjected to multiple-year safety and technical reviews. Once certified, standardized designs may be used in multiple locations. Four next-generation designs have been certified thus far — three Westinghouse pressurized water reactors and one General Electric boiling water reactor.

2. Site review

Utilities may apply for an optional early site review during which the NRC evaluates environmental and safety issues at a proposed construction site. Such a site review can air out potential disputes and give utilities more certainty as they prepare to file for a construction and operating license. A site approval may be used for 20 years after it's issued.



3. Combined construction and operating license

The NRC has combined what were two separate licensing requirements into one, known as a COL, and consolidated public hearings in an effort to streamline its bureaucracy. The granting of a license amounts to a regulatory green light, allowing a company to break ground for a project. Utilities are expected to file the first license applications this year.

