protection against radiological sabotage provided the licensee demonstrates that the alternative measures have ''the same high assurance objective'' and meet ''the general performance requirements'' of the regulation, and ''the overall level of system performance provides protection against radiological sabotage equivalent'' to that which would be provided by the regulation.

Currently, unescorted access into the protected areas at the Vogtle site is controlled through the use of a photograph on a badge/keycard (hereafter, referred to as ''badge''). The security officers at each entrance station use the photograph on the badge to visually identify the individual requesting access. The licensee's employees and contractor personnel who have been granted unescorted access are issued badges upon entrance at each entrance/exit location and the badges are returned upon exit. The badges are stored and are retrievable at each entrance/exit location. In accordance with 10 CFR 73.55(d)(5), contractors are not allowed to take these badges offsite.

Under the proposed biometric system, each individual who is authorized unescorted entry into protected areas would have the physical characteristics of his/her hand (i.e., hand geometry) registered, along with his/her number, in the access control system. When a registered user enters his/her badge into the card reader and places his/her hand onto the measuring surface, the system detects that the hand is properly positioned, and records the image. The unique characteristics of the hand image are then compared with the previously stored template in the access control computer system corresponding to the badge to verify authorization for entry.

Individuals, including Vogtle plant employees and contractors, would be allowed to keep their badges when they depart the site and, thus, eliminate the need to issue, retrieve, and store badges at the entrance stations to the plant. Badges do not carry any information other than a unique identification number.

All other access processes, including search function capability, would remain the same. This system would not be used for persons requiring escorted access (i.be., visitors).

Based on the Sandia report, ''A performance Evaluation of Biometrics Identification Devices,'' SAND91–0276•UC–906, Unlimited Release, June 1991, that concluded hand geometry equipment possesses strong performance and high detection characteristics, and on its own experience with the current photo-identification system the licensee determined that the proposed hand geometry system would provide the same high level of assurance as the current system that access is only granted to authorized individuals. The biometric system has been in use for a number of years at several sensitive Department of Energy facilities and, recently, at nuclear power plants.

The licensee will implement a process for testing the proposed system to ensure continued overall level of performance equivalent to that specified in the regulation. When the changes are implemented, the respective Physical Security Plan will be revised to include implementation and testing of the hand geometry access control system and to allow Vogtle plant employees and contractors to take their badges offsite.

When implemented, the licensee will control all points of personnel access into a protected area under the observation of security personnel through the use of a badge and a hand geometry verification system. The numbered picture badge identification system will continue to be used for all individuals who are authorized unescorted access to protected areas. Badges will continue to be displayed by all individuals while inside the protected areas.

Since both the badge and hand geometry would be necessary for access into the protected areas, the proposed system would provide a positive verification process. The potential loss of a badge by an individual as a result of taking the badge offsite would not enable an unauthorized entry into protected areas.

IV

For the foregoing reasons, pursuant to 10 CFR 73.55, the NRC staff has determined that the proposed alternative measures for protection against radiological sabotage meet ''the same high assurance objective,'' and ''the general performance requirements'' of the regulation and that ''the overall level of system performance provides protection against radiological sabotage equivalent'' to that which would be provided by the regulation.

Accordingly, the Commission has determined that, pursuant to 10 CFR 73.5, this exemption is authorized by law and will not endanger life or property or common defense and security, and is otherwise in the public interest. Therefore, the Commission hereby grants the requested exemption from the requirements of 10 CFR 73.55(d)(5) to allow individuals not employed by the licensee (i.e., contractors) to take their photo identification badges offsite, provided that the proposed hand geometry biometrics system is in effect to control access into protected areas at the Vogtle Nuclear Plant.

Pursuant to 10 CFR 51.32, the Commission has determined that the granting of this exemption will not result in any significant adverse environmental impact (60 FR 35964).

For further details with respect to this action, see the request for exemption dated February 14, 1995, which is available for public inspection at the Commission's Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, NW., Washington, DC, and at the local public document room located at the Burke County Public Library, 412 Fourth Street, Waynesboro, Georgia.

This exemption is effective when modifications, procedures, and training to implement the hand geometry biometrics system have been completed and the corresponding revisions to the Physical Security Plan for the Vogtle plant have been submitted, and reviewed and approved by the staff.

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 12th day of July 1995.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Steven A. Varga,

Director, Division of Reactor Projects—I/II, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation.

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[Docket Nos. 50–206, 50–361, 50–362]

Southern California Edison Company; San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, Unit Nos. 1, 2, and 3; Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (the Commission) is considering issuance of an exemption from certain requirements of its regulations to Facility Operating License Nos. DPR 13, NPF–10, and NPF–15, issued to Southern California Edison (the licensee), for operation of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, Units 1, 2, and 3, located in San Diego County, California.

Environmental Assessment

Identification of the Proposed Action

The proposed exemption would allow individuals not employed by the licensee (i.e., contractors) who have unescorted access to retain possession of their picture badges instead of returning them as they exit the protected area.

The proposed action is in accordance with the licensee's application dated