conducted, the time when the tests would be run, nor the acceptance criteria for the tests. The proposed exemption also would not change the requirements of Section III.D.2(b)(i) regarding the 6-month periodic test of the air lock at P_a, nor the existing CNS safety limits, safety settings, power operations, or effluent limits.

III.

Pursuant to 10 CFR 50.12(a), ''Specific exemptions,'' the Commission may, upon application of any interested person or upon its own initiative, grant such exemptions in this part as it determines are authorized by law, will not present an undue risk to the public health and safety, are consistent with the common defense and security, and for which special circumstances identified in 50.12(a)(2) are present.

The licensee is proposing to conduct the first air lock test during restart at a test pressure of 3 psig, which is less than P_a, which is not presently allowed by Section III.D.2(b)(ii). The air lock leakage measured at the reduced test pressure would be extrapolated to a value consistent with P_a, then that value would be compared to the acceptance criteria in Appendix J for Type B tests to confirm that containment integrity is verified. If containment integrity is verified, the measured air lock leakage is considered acceptable.

For CNS, by testing the air lock at reduced pressure of 3 psig, a strongback (structural bracing) would not have to be installed on the inner air lock door. During the test, the space between the inner and outer doors is pressurized. The strongback is needed when the test pressure is P_a because the pressure exerted on the inner door during the test is in a direction opposite to the pressure on the inner door during an accident, and the test pressure is sufficiently high to damage the inner door without the strongback. The reduced pressure test is conducted at a pressure low enough such that the strongback is not needed to protect the inner door.

When no maintenance or repairs have been performed on the air lock that could affect its sealing capability and the periodic 6-month test at P_a has been performed successfully, there is no reason to expect the air lock to leak excessively because it has been opened during a plant shutdown or refueling outage. When the air lock is tested at a pressure less than P_a in preparation for restart from refueling or cold shutdown, the air lock would have been successfully tested at P_a within the previous six months.

Accordingly, the Commission concludes that the licensee's proposed exemption to conduct the first air lock test during the restart from refueling or cold shutdown (when the air lock was opened while containment integrity was not required by the TSs) at the reduced pressure of 3 psig in CNS TS 4.7.A.2.f.5 is acceptable, provided no maintenance or repairs have been performed on the air lock which would affect its sealing capability since the last 6-month test required by Section III.D.2(b)(i) of Appendix J. Section III.D.2(b)(i) requires a test of the air lock at not less than P_a every 6 months since the initial fuel loading and this requirement is not being changed by this exemption. If maintenance or repairs have been performed on the air lock affecting its sealing capability since the last 6-month test, the first test prior to entering a condition which requires containment integrity must meet the test pressure requirements of Section III.D.2(b)(ii) and be conducted at a test pressure not less than P_a.

Although the licensee conducts the second air lock test during restart at P_a to meet Section III.D.2(b)(i) and thus begin the 6-month interval for air lock tests during the power operating cycle, this exemption does not require that the second test be conducted at P_a. The entry into an operational mode which requires containment integrity by the TSs must be based on an assurance that the containment has such integrity. This assurance can not rely on a test to be conducted hours or days in the future after the operational mode has been entered, unless the proper test can only be conducted after entering the operational mode (i.e., the proper conditions for the test do not exist in the prior mode). An air lock test at P_a could be conducted before entering the operational mode requiring containment integrity and has been conducted in this manner in the past at CNS. Therefore, in approving this exemption to allow the first air lock test during restart to be conducted at the reduced test pressure of 3 psig, the staff does not rely on the second test being conducted at P_a. The method used to correlate the reduced pressure leakage rates to the full pressure leakage rates shall be in accordance with the NRC staff's safety evaluation and the Franklin Research Center technical evaluation report enclosed with the exemption of September 3, 1982.

The special circumstances for granting this exemption pursuant to 10 CFR 50.12 have been identified in the licensee's application dated May 13, 1994. The purpose of Appendix J to 10 CFR Part 50 is to ensure that the containment leaktight integrity can be verified periodically throughout the service lifetime of the containment (including the air lock) so as to maintain containment leakage within the limits specified in the design basis accident analyses that were part of the basis for licensing CNS. The proposed alternative test method is sufficient to achieve the underlying purpose of the regulation in that it provides adequate assurance of the leaktight integrity of the air lock, and thus of the containment.

Consequently, the special circumstances described in 10 CFR 50.12(a)(2)(ii) exist in that the application of the regulation in these particular circumstances is not necessary to achieve the underlying purpose of the rule in that the licensee has proposed an acceptable alternative test method that accomplishes the intent of the regulation.

IV.

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the Commission has determined that, pursuant to 10 CFR 50.12(a), the exemption requested by the licensee in its letter dated May 13, 1994, is authorized by law, will not present an undue risk to the public health and safety, is consistent with the common defense and security, and has present special circumstances which are identified in 50.12(a)(2). The Commission hereby grants to the licensee an exemption from the requirements in Section III.D.2(b)(ii) of Appendix J to 10 CFR Part 50, to allow reduced pressure testing of the personnel airlock in accordance with TS 4.7.A.2.f.5, prior to entry into operational modes requiring containment integrity, provided there has been no maintenance or repair of the air lock that could affect its sealing capability since the last 6-month test of the air lock.

Pursuant to 10 CFR 51.32, the Commission has also determined that the issuance of the exemption will have no significant impact on the environment. An Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact was noticed in the Federal Register on November 6, 1995 (60 FR 57250).

For further details with respect to this action, see the licensee's request for exemption dated May 13, 1994, which is available for public inspection at the Commission's Public Document Room, the Gelman Building, 2120 L Street, NW., Washington, DC, and at the Commission's Local Public Document Room at the Auburn Public Library, 118 15th Street, Auburn, NE 68305.

This exemption is effective upon issuance.