The Modernize Nuclear Reactor Environmental Reviews Act directs the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to consider how to conduct more efficient environmental reviews.

**Summary**

The Modernize Nuclear Reactor Environmental Reviews Act would improve the efficiency of environmental reviews by expanding the use of categorical exclusions (CATEX), environmental assessments (EA), and generic environmental impact statements (GEIS). Today, the NRC must always prepare a detailed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for new nuclear reactors. This bill also directs a rulemaking that allows the NRC to prepare EAs instead, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These changes are consistent with NEPA, other federal agency environmental review practices, and can significantly improve the NRC’s environmental review processes.

**History:**

Our current fleet of nuclear reactors has hundreds of operating reactor years, and has shown that nuclear has a small environmental impact. Many of the next generation of reactors are more efficient and use less land and water for both construction and operation. However, under today’s regulations, the NRC must prepare a comprehensive EIS for all new nuclear power facilities. Allowing the NRC to prepare EAs instead of automatically having to prepare an EIS, which can take years and millions of dollars to complete, can save significant resources while still achieving the environmental goals of statutes like NEPA. If needed, the NRC can still require an EIS should the impact of a project merit that level of analysis.

Other federal agencies widely utilize categorical exclusions, environmental assessments, and generic environmental impact statements. This bill directs the NRC to incorporate these best practices. Furthermore, building upon the NRC’s ongoing development of an Advanced Nuclear Reactor Generic Environmental Impact Statement, which we continue to support, this bill directs the NRC to incorporate this effort in a rulemaking for optional use.

**Specifics:**

The Modernize Nuclear Reactor Environmental Reviews Act makes a number of changes to modernize the NRC’s environmental review process maintaining important environmental safeguards.

- Directs the NRC to prepare a report to consider how other federal agencies use categorical exclusions, environmental assessments, and generic environmental impact statements for actions relating to nuclear reactors.
- Instructs the NRC to also consider how to use these items, which are currently used in some of the NRC’s other oversight roles, for nuclear reactors in the report.
- Promotes collaboration between federal agencies for environmental reviews by considering any opportunities in the report.
- Directs a rulemaking incorporating any areas of improvement from the report, including additional categorical exclusions that could be applied.
● Establishes an optional generic environmental impact statement rulemaking for new nuclear reactors, building upon the NRC’s current efforts.
● Amends the NRC’s regulations to allow the use of environmental assessments and categorical exclusions, as appropriate, instead of requiring the preparation of an environmental impact statement.

**Original Sponsors:**
Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-SC)

**Congress.gov Link:**