



NRC NEWS

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No. S-08-043

Prepared Remarks of NRC Chairman Dale E. Klein

Industry Roundtable

November 14, 2008
New Delhi, India

Thank you. I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet with you at this important time in the history of civilian nuclear cooperation between our two nations. Our national governments are continuing the process of putting into place the new Section 123 U.S.-India Agreement for Civil Nuclear Cooperation. In the meantime, both the United States and India are anticipating and preparing for new business development and trade in the nuclear industry.

Let me say that in the United States there is currently a great deal of activity as the nuclear energy industry seeks to expand over the next several years. When I left Washington D.C. a few days ago, the NRC had received 17 license applications for 26 reactors. We expect to receive perhaps as many as two dozen applications, for more than 30 units, by the end of 2009.

In addition, our agency has been experiencing a significant increase in licensing activities with regard to power uprates and license renewals at operating power plants... as well as uranium recovery and fuel processing facilities. And we recently received an application from the U.S. Department of Energy for a high-level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. This very large and complex application contains over 8,000 pages with well over one million pages of supporting documents and technical reports.

We also have authority over the export and import of nuclear components and materials. Industries in the United States see themselves as participants in the global nuclear marketplace; and any new reactors in the U.S. will likely draw upon manufacturers and suppliers from many nations. So we anticipate, and are prepared for, significant new activity in this area... and we are making every effort to maintain a four-month schedule for reviewing applications for import and export licenses.

In order to perform all this work, we have been increasing the staff at the NRC by about 200 people per year over the last three years. Industry is also significantly expanding its effort to hire and train new employees. This workforce expansion includes not only the people necessary

to build and operate potential new plants, but also new employees to meet growing demand in the nuclear manufacturing sector. You may have heard that Areva and Northrop Grumman are cooperating to build a new facility for manufacturing large nuclear components in Norfolk, Virginia – which is a major center for forging and shipbuilding. As Ambassador Mulford also pointed out: there is a lot happening in the United States with regard to commercial nuclear energy!

The NRC promotes public confidence in the safety and security of nuclear facilities and programs by being a tough regulator with high standards. In fact, many believe that one of the strengths of the commercial nuclear energy sector in the U.S. is the NRC's commitment to scientific objectivity, technical competence, and regulatory independence.

The high standards we demand in engineering, construction, and quality of components, as well as the thoroughness of our review process, may appear overly burdensome to some people. Yet I would point out that while our activities may appear intrusive, the U.S. fleet of commercial nuclear plants operate at an average efficiency rate above 90 percent. In fact, many of the things we require as a regulator – such as high quality components and extensive operator training – contribute to efficiency. So it is my belief that these high standards actually benefit industry over the long term. It has certainly contributed, in my view, to the safe operation of the current plants in the U.S.; and to the high levels of public confidence in nuclear safety that we see today. Of course, the same rigor that we apply to help ensure the safe operation of U.S. nuclear power plants also extends to vendors and manufacturers through the whole supply chain. I wish I could take credit for the NRC's good work as an enabler of safe nuclear power. But our agency's strong reputation has been built up over many years, by thousands of hard-working men and women. Thanks to their efforts, the NRC's certifications and licenses are considered by many to be the gold standard around the world.

In recent years, our agency has reviewed and certified four new commercial reactor designs. You may be aware that China announced plans to build several new reactors based on one of these designs: the Westinghouse AP 1000. Since the NRC had already certified the AP 1000 design, this presented an opportunity for more extensive cooperation between our two nations – specifically, between our agency and the Chinese nuclear regulatory authorities. Last year, a team of NRC staff went to China and worked with their regulatory staff to train them on the U.S. review and certification process for the AP 1000. Over the next year, when construction of the AP 1000 reactors begins in China, the Chinese regulatory authority has invited the NRC to send inspectors to observe the construction activities.

This cooperation reflects the NRC's commitment to building strong relationships with its regulatory partners. We believe that it is both expensive and unnecessary for regulators to operate in a vacuum. Moreover, we recognize that a higher degree of harmonization in nuclear plant designs will benefit public health and safety, industry, and regulators. One of the most important international projects currently underway in this area is the Multinational Design Evaluation Program, or MDEP. This is a joint effort involving the U.S., and eight other nuclear nations to promote cooperation on aligning reactor designs, codes, and standards.

MDEP applies to current reactor technology. But to promote multilateral cooperation on developing the *next* generation of reactors, the U.S. is also involved in a project called the

Generation IV International Forum. At the NRC, we view nuclear safety as a global concern, requiring global cooperation, and I have repeatedly urged active engagement, by both the NRC and industry, in international nuclear organizations and projects.

On that note, let me conclude by mentioning the excellent relationship that exists between the nuclear regulatory communities in India and the U.S. The NRC has a longstanding relationship involving nuclear safety cooperation with the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board of India, and we have been meeting several times each year for over five years.

I am very pleased to tell you that last year, two AERB scientists served as temporary experts on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff in the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, and the Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research. We look forward to the opportunity to host additional technical and scientific experts in the near future. We also look forward to our expanding cooperation in civil nuclear technology and information-sharing with India. I believe that this can further enhance safety, and can lead to significant benefits for both of our countries. The AERB has significant experience overseeing the licensing and construction of new nuclear power plants, and I believe that there is much we could learn from each other.

Therefore, I urge you to support your government in carrying through with the remaining steps that will lead to further cooperation between our nations in promoting safety and security in civilian nuclear technology.

Thank you for this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you.