

Plain Writing Act Compliance Annual Report April 2023

Dissemination

- In response to the *Plain Writing Act of 2010* [the Act], an action memorandum from the Executive Director for Operations (EDO) instructed all managers to familiarize themselves with the requirements of the Act, and to encourage staff to take appropriate training.
- Staff is reminded to use plain language through periodic articles in the agency's in-house newsletter, the *NRC Reporter*, and other newsletters targeted to specific staff members such as *The Administrative Exchange*.
- The Commission has also directed staff to make greater use of plain language when engaging with the public, especially on topics of significant interest.
- The EDO issued a communication standard, follow-up guidance, and checklists to direct and assist staff on improving the quality of documents. Additionally, several training courses have been implemented, which focus on introducing and reinforcing the basic concepts of plain writing and clear communication.

Action Plan

- The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) identified the following documents that should be the focus of plain writing: Performance Assessments, Generic Communications, Inspection Reports, and Significant Enforcement Actions. These are stored in the agency's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System database and are accessible through the NRC's public website and the Public Document Room in Rockville, MD. In cases where a document is technically complex, employees are instructed to provide a plain language cover memo or abstract.
- Most documents prepared by the NRC staff are reviewed by technical editors who review them for a variety of things including appropriate use of plain language. The technical editors (and NRC staff preparing documents) are expected to follow NUREG-1379, Rev. 3, "NRC Editorial Style Guide," which includes a chapter entitled "Plain Language." The Style Guide has been revised to better align the NRC's plain writing guidance with Federal Plain Language Guidelines.

In April 2022, the NRC issued its Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2022-2026. The Strategic Plan includes goals for inspiring stakeholder confidence in the NRC. To achieve this goal, the NRC must be viewed as an independent, open, and reliable regulator. This will be accomplished by providing stakeholders with clear and accurate information about the agency's regulatory processes. Plainly written, concise, and well-organized written products foster fully informed decisions, convey better context on the subject to stakeholders and the public, demonstrate NRC's commitment to openness and transparency, and help to ensure that our regulatory decisions are clearly communicated and better understood. The NRC is focused on enhancing the NRC's information on public websites and presence in social media, and is committed to using stakeholder feedback to update, enhance, and increase the communication tools and processes used to reach and engage with the public.

In addition to the continued focus on improving external communications, the NRC continues to take steps to measurably increase the quality of its internal communications by clarifying expectations for written products. The Office of the Executive Director for Operations (OEDO) made significant updates to internal webpages that provide guidance and templates to NRC staff for communicating with external and internal audiences. The OEDO worked with the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) to implement a significant change to this year's Information Digest, by updating the NRC's webpage glossary, with items written in plain language and is committed to periodically updating those pages.

In April 2022, the NRC issued Revision 3 to NUREG-1379 which substantially aligns NRC style with three well-known authorities (*The Chicago Manual of Style Online*, *the GPO Style Manual*, and *Federal Plain Language Guidelines*). The Editorial Style Guide addresses editorial issues that the NRC staff and contractors often handle, links writers and editors to external authorities and agency resources for additional information on the topics covered, including the principles of plain writing. Moreover, the Editorial Style Guide includes a new section that provides guidance on how to use more inclusive language, as well as suggested alternatives. The staff launched an Open Opportunity on USAJobs to solicit volunteers to expand upon the 2021 gender-neutral writing initiative into broad forms of inclusive language and provide recommendations to employees for oral and written communications. These staff serve as Inclusive Language Ambassadors and have collectively provided numerous trainings to individual offices, conducted agencywide seminars, provided training during the 2022 Equal Employment Opportunity training for supervisors, and provided input for the Inclusive Language section within the Editorial Style Guide.

In August 2022, OEDO conducted a virtual pop-up seminar with over 100 staff from the Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards (NMSS) related to external communications with diverse audience. During this seminar, staff discussed the importance of using plain language when communicating with external stakeholders and members of the public, and shared examples of effective communications.

Individual offices and staff members play an active role in supporting agencywide efforts to improve written products. Staff continued to engage with each other on topics of interest related to writing, seeking support with writing challenges, and sharing resources in an online Writing "Community of Practice." Additionally, the NRC editors and other individuals from across the agency, who are known for their strong writing skills, provide training and advice to staff on how to draft public products, including, press releases, public presentations, and social media postings.

Website

Consistent with the Act's requirements, the NRC created a section on our public website, under the broader topic of Open Government, that outlines our Plain Writing Action Plan and offers general guidance on plain writing at the NRC. All annual reports are posted there (<https://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/open/plain-writing/nrc-plan-rpts-news.html#plan>).

Training

The NRC offers multiple training courses to teach elements of plain writing and clear communication. All staff members are encouraged to take the basic courses. Employees who write documents read by the public are encouraged to pursue more extensive training options. Options include a variety of on-demand and instructor-led courses such as:

- Abbreviating, Capitalizing, and Using Numbers
- Audience and Purpose in Business Writing
- Clarity and Conciseness in Business Writing
- Creating Well-Constructed Sentences
- Communicating Effectively with Customers
- Editing and Proofreading Business Documents
- Getting the Details Right: Spelling Basics
- Improving Your Technical Writing Skills
- Proofreading: Applying the NRC “Editorial Style Guide”
- The Plain Writing Act
- Troublesome Words and Phrases: Common Mistakes in Writing
- Using Punctuation Marks
- Using the Parts of Speech
- Writing Back to Basics

In fiscal year 2022, staff and managers completed these courses a total of 349 times.

In 2022, NRC continued to offer its highly successful training course, “Writing: Back to Basics.” The course materials have been developed specifically for NRC writers by staff subject matter experts within the NMSS Rulemaking Center of Expertise. The curriculum uses real NRC documents and examples to refresh and increase knowledge of subject-verb agreement, clauses, parallel construction, active voice versus passive voice, paragraph structure, and plain writing. The course includes presenter-led modules and hands-on drafting, writing, and editing exercises. Since its inception, more than 250 staff and managers from across the agency have participated in the course. This popular training course, offered quarterly, is routinely full and waitlisted. Due to high demand, the participant limit was increased from 25 to 30 participants. In 2022, 90 employees completed this training.

Stakeholder Feedback

The NRC has a long-standing commitment to openness and transparency. Since the passage of the Act, the agency has implemented subscription-based services on the NRC public website to enable stakeholders to keep abreast of current agency news and activities. The NRC has enhanced stakeholder involvement in public meetings by revising the agency’s public statement on public meetings, which in part, encourages staff to employ innovative ways to interact with the public, including using varied meeting formats to maximize opportunities for public participation and engagement and expanding the use of Web event and virtual meeting technologies. Furthermore, staff continues to use interactive forums to promote stakeholder engagement and awareness, including social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook. OPA continues to apply the Flesch Grade Level Readability Formula to its written products, especially social media content, to enhance the public's understanding of NRC activities, mission and programs.