

Statement by Samuel Collins, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulations

**Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation
October 2002**

I am pleased to address the Commission regarding NRR policies, practices, successes and challenges related to equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity management. NRR is committed to the Agency's EEO and Diversity policies, goals and guiding principles. I would like to acknowledge the NRR management team and staff efforts in these areas, in particular, the Executive Team members. I would also like to acknowledge the support from SBCR management and staff as well as NRR members of EEO Advisory Committees who have collaborated with us in advancing our EEO and diversity initiatives and activities.

Since I last addressed the Commission in 1998, we have undertaken several new activities as well as enhanced those that have been successful. I believe we can achieve our goal of having a highly qualified, effective and diverse management team and staff through hiring, staff development, and retention of the best available people we can recruit. As you are aware, in today's job market, attracting highly qualified, experienced people to fill many of our positions is a challenge especially in technical areas where we are competing for the same resources as those entities we regulate. We have taken on this challenge and I will discuss several initiatives we are actively pursuing. We have also challenged ourselves to maintain a healthy and positive work environment. I strongly encourage diversity training and awareness; open door policies and quality communications; interactions with the various NRR members of EEO Advisory committees; mentoring; and management and staff participation in recruitment activities.

I will now expand on these various activities, noting our successes, challenges, and plans.

NRR workforce demographics

As of August 2002, NRR had a total of 577 full and part-time employees. Of the total, 28 percent are minorities and 15 percent are other than minority females. The table below summarizes the demographics of the NRR's workforce by race/ethnicity and gender.

Race/Ethnicity	Total (577)	Percentage
African-American	55	9.5%
Native American	1	0.2%
Asian Pacific American	93	16.1%
Hispanic	20	3.5%
White Female	88	15.2%
White Male	320	55.5%

Since the end of FY 2000, NRR has increased the representation percentages of all minority groups in the office with its representation of Asian Pacific Americans (16%) being among the highest in the agency. In this time frame, NRR has also made significant progress in its Hispanic recruiting nearly doubling their representation in the NRR workforce. Short term challenge areas for NRR recruiting include increasing representation of women, sustaining the recruiting progress with Hispanics, establishing sustained progress in our African American recruitment efforts, and initiating an entry level pipeline for the Asian Pacific American group.

1. Hiring policies and practices

NRR continues to aggressively recruit at universities and professional minority conferences in an effort to attract highly qualified women and minorities. Specifically, NRR managers and technical staff have been

active participants at agency-sponsored focused recruitment events (University of Puerto Rico, FAMU, North Carolina A&T, Penn State). As a result of these actions, we made progress toward achieving our goal to enhance representation of women and minorities at the entry-level.

The Intern Program has been and continues to be, an effective recruitment incentive for recent graduates and students and a key tool towards NRR's goal of a highly qualified, diverse workforce. We have been successful in utilizing the Intern Program to attract and hire a diverse group of high caliber entry-level employees to carry out the agency's mission. Since the program was restarted in FY2001, NRR has hired 29 individuals for this program. The demographics of the program participants (34.4% White males, 41.3% Hispanics, 17.2% African Americans, 6.8% White Females) is very favorable with respect to its diversity.

NRR has also been using the summer hire program to establish a highly qualified, diverse feeder pool for the Intern Program. During FY 2002, NRR hired 11 students (45.4% White males, 18.2% White Females, 18.2% Asian Pacific Americans, 18.2% African Americans) for our summer hire program from various colleges and universities. These students are actively pursuing degrees in engineering or science. NRR is working with its partners in HR and SBCR to better institutionalize these arrangements through the Co-Op program.

Finally, since the last time I reported to the Commission, NRR has made progress in providing opportunities on bridge positions for individuals to transition from the clerical field to administrative positions. NRR has created upward mobility positions in administrative areas of budget, human resources, and work planning. In addition, we now post licensing assistant positions as a career ladder position starting at the GG-7 level so that highly qualified clerical staff can apply. We believe that this practice will be a positive contribution towards retaining our top clerical staff.

2. Support for Staff Welfare

A highly qualified, diverse workforce at all levels of the office helps retain our highly talented and motivated staff. Since I met with the Commission in 1998, representation of minorities and women in the supervisory/managerial ranks was a challenge then and remains so today. Since 1998, the NRR representation of minorities and women in the management/supervisory level has increased from 14 to 27 percent with the most significant increase in the Asian Pacific American group which increased from 4 to 9 individuals. Despite the progress, representation of women and minorities in the supervisory ranks remains a significant challenge and is an NRR focus when it considers the Leadership Potential and SES Candidate Development Programs.

NRR has been instrumental in supporting career development through rotational assignments; a key tool in developing a highly qualified, diverse workforce. More than 10% of the NRR staff has participated in rotational assignments during FY 2002. Management and staff routinely encourage employees to participate in this process. Compared to NRR practices in the past, there has been a significant increase in the number of Asian Pacific American employees participating in rotations. We believe that this is an important factor in reversing trends identified by the APAAC concerning time-in-grade for Asian Pacific Americans.

We continue to encourage and support the mentoring program as a tool to further long term diversity goals. Along with SBCR's support, NRR has incorporated the agency's mentor/mentee program as a key component of its Intern Program. Almost every SES manager in NRR is acting as a mentor for an NRR Intern. I believe the combined support provided by SBCR and NRR will further improve the opportunity for success of our new hires.

Finally, NRR has been a leader with the agency-wide Flexiplace program which is designed to create a positive workplace environment to help attract and retain a high qualified staff. In coordination with HR and LMPC, NRR developed expanded guidance to help supervisors and participants become better familiar with the program. Currently, NRR has 53 employees (about 10% of its staff) participating in the Flexiplace program. We also encourage the use of the project based Flexiplace option.

3. Diversity Awareness

NRR has worked closely with SBCR to provide managing diversity sessions for NRR managers and staff. The managing diversity sessions are designed to enhance staff awareness and encourage their commitment to create and maintain a positive NRR work environment that supports the contribution of all its members. The sessions have enlightened employees regarding how successfully managing diversity in organizations can impact how we carry out our safety mission. We anticipate that this training be completed with a majority of NRR staff participating by early November 2002.

Individual members of the NRR Executive Team serve as points of contact for NRR employees who serve in each agency EEO Advisory Committee. The Executive Team members meet on a regular basis with the NRR members of each EEO Advisory Committee to discuss NRR employee and organizational issues. This initiative has significantly improved communication with the Agency's EEO Advisory Committees on matters of mutual interest and has led to several innovative changes. For example, an outreach program to Historically Black Colleges and Universities within the Washington, D.C. metro area is being developed to create an opportunity to exchange career development ideas with science and engineering faculty and leaders of engineering student organizations. Additionally, NRR has initiated an open house for Howard University's Science and Engineering Faculty and students in the fall.

4. Communications

Communication and feedback is a key method for motivating a highly qualified diverse workforce. NRR is committed to ensuring that employees receive candid feedback on their job performance through performance appraisals and feedback from the merit promotion process. Since I last addressed you, along with several other program offices, NRR has moved to more standardized elements and standards in its non-SES performance appraisals thereby increasing the consistency and effectiveness of performance appraisal reviews. During this appraisal year, we made considerable efforts to ensure that performance objectives are reasonable; and that employees were invited to participate in discussion on performance expectations in a timely manner. With regard to the merit selection process, it continues to be NRR's policy for supervisors and managers to interview all of the best qualified applicants for job vacancies.

Supervisors and managers are then better positioned to provide constructive employee feedback. This enables the employee to identify areas where additional focus maybe needed and obtain guidance on how to improve their application packages and interview skills to enhance their opportunity for future vacancies.

NRR has initiated several innovative activities to improve communication with NRR staff. The Executive Team electronically transmits a weekly newsletter to communicate key activities, management expectations, and employee achievements. In addition, NRR news, accomplishments, and information are broadcast through illuminated message boards placed in the elevator lobbies on all NRR floors. In conclusion, I am committed to achieving a high quality diverse workforce. I will continue to be an active and innovative proponent of the agency's EEO Program. I look forward to the year ahead and appreciate the opportunity to present this information to the Commission.