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**COORDINATION:**

The EDO has concurred in this paper. OGC has no legal objection.

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changes in this area over the past few years, the International Council concludes that a more thorough review of existing guidance and practices should be conducted to identify improvements that would increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff's international activities, taking into consideration any further specific guidance the Commission provides to help satisfy its requirements. As appropriate, the International Council would be prepared to discuss the results of its review with the Commission before the end of this fiscal year.

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UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

February 27, 2001

MEMORANDUM TO: Chairman Meserve  
Commissioner Dicus  
Commissioner Diaz  
Commissioner McGaffigan  
Commissioner Merrifield

FROM: Janice Dunn Lee, Director  
Office of International Programs 

SUBJECT: CONDUCT OF NRC'S INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

**PURPOSE:**

To discuss the planning and conduct of staff-level international activities, including the coordination and approval of foreign travel, and associated reporting requirements.

**BACKGROUND:**

Within the International Nuclear Safety Support arena of the Strategic Plan, the Commission and staff engage in international nuclear policy formulation, licensing of exports and imports of nuclear materials and equipment, treaty implementation, nuclear proliferation deterrence, international nuclear safety and safeguards cooperation and assistance, and international safety research. These activities support U.S. foreign policy interests as well as provide access to valuable non-U.S. safety information and to foreign research facilities and resources.

The Appendix to the Strategic Plan provides an expanded discussion of NRC's international activities, purposes, approaches and strategies, including a recognition of the benefits which accrue directly and indirectly to the domestic U.S. regulatory program and in leveraging our research resources.

An overview of current NRC international programs, with specific examples, was presented to the Commission in the annual staff briefing on that subject, on August 15, 2000.

Information paper SECY-00-152, dated July 12, 2000, summarizes the role and status of NRC's international agreements and arrangements.

A memorandum to the Commission, dated February 22, 2001, describes the preparation and review process for IAEA safety standards, NRC staff participation in that process, and activities under discussion in the main IAEA review committees.

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A paper on International Priorities is underway and will be forwarded separately for Commission information.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The scope and pace of NRC's international activities have increased greatly in the last several years. Globalization of nuclear safety and commercial interests, the breakup of the Soviet Union and associated political and program developments, low-cost international travel, and the revolution in electronic information and communications technologies, have expanded and sped-up the processes of international nuclear cooperation. The NRC Program Offices have (1) responded to an increasing number of requests from foreign regulators and (2) increased the staff's understanding of foreign regulatory and facility operating experience to yield useful information to our domestic regulatory program. International organizations, foreign regulatory and safety agencies, and U.S. Executive Branch agencies have routinely sought NRC's nuclear safety, safeguards and non-proliferation expertise and involvement in helping to plan and carry out worldwide nuclear safety and safeguards activities.

Each year, NRC invites foreign participation in several meetings and activities which we organize or sponsor. In turn, NRC and the technical staff are requested to participate in a great number of international conferences, meetings, working groups, review committees, advisory groups and missions, training courses, and joint research efforts covering a broad spectrum of nuclear concerns. NRC managers strive to make well-informed decisions in deciding which of these activities to support, consistent with the Agency's strategic and performance goals.

This paper provides a discussion of current processes and staff activities and is intended to contribute to on-going deliberations on how best to inform the Commission of staff participation in international activities of particular interest to the Commission, and invite and receive timely Commission guidance when international cooperative ventures of special significance to the NRC are entering a policy-formulation phase.

### The International Strategic Arena

As discussed in the NRC Strategic Plan for FY 2000 - FY 2005, international activities maintain support of NRC's domestic mission as well as broader U.S. interests. NRC helps influence the incorporation of effective policies and practices into nuclear programs of other countries and international organizations to maintain safety and security and to reduce the potential for proliferation, while gaining valuable knowledge, experience, and resources for our own regulatory and research programs. The staff employs three strategies in these efforts, namely, taking an active international role, focusing agency activities and resources on significant international obligations and priorities, and enhancing the coordination and alignment of these activities within the NRC.

Improved processes to pursue these strategies effectively and efficiently, including means to enhance the policy and leadership roles of the Commission, are in the first stages of discussion.

### International Council

Coordination of broad staff-level international activities is facilitated by the International Council (IC) which is made up of the Directors of the Program Offices, the Director of OIP, and the Assistant for Operations, EDO. An Assistant General Counsel also attends IC meetings. The IC, which was constituted in May 2000 and meets quarterly, helps ensure that NRC maintains a more focused international program supported by all involved offices to promote a common approach to, and provide more timely information and guidance on, international issues, activities, and expected outcomes. The IC provides a forum for senior managers to address questions and resolve problems. The IC also discusses best practices and helps OIP and the EDO identify issues which merit Commission attention, consultation or decision.

As a result of these discussions IC members conclude that a more comprehensive review of the current guidance and processes may be necessary to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff's international activities. For example, a review may improve the coordination of international activities by establishing a consistent method to identify planned and completed foreign travel. Another example involves the IC efforts to help coordinate staff actions to implement the October 13, 2000, Staff Requirements Memorandum (SRM) on the August 15, 2000, briefing on NRC International Activities. One of these tasks is to develop OIP guidelines to notify the Commission when there are significant differences between international activities and NRC's regulations or practices to enable an evaluation of whether the U.S. should consider change. This requires defining criteria or a format for the form and content of foreign trip reports, and the distribution requirements and schedules for completing trip reports.

### Operating Plans

Major staff-level international activities and milestones are incorporated in various Operating Plans of the responsible offices throughout the agency. In parallel, the Program Offices develop international travel plans at the beginning of each fiscal year, reflecting current priorities and budgetary limits. The travel plans are updated monthly as well as at the time specific trips are authorized. Significant additions, deletions, or revisions of international activities, including changes in the level of support being requested by a Lead Office from a Supporting Office to meet international milestones or performance measures, are vetted with OIP and other office managers having a direct interest.

Authorizations for international travel and resource expenditures for international activities are made by NRC Office Directors and other managers on a case-by-case basis, weighing priorities, alternatives, competing requirements, and the availability of personnel and other resources. In so doing, managers clarify their expectations in regard to the travel or activity, and give programmatic guidance to their staff.

There are some minor variations between offices in the details of planning and approving foreign travel. At least one office prioritizes proposed trips on the basis of the Strategic Plan goals and approves the travel requests having the highest ranking. In all Offices, adjustments to the approved foreign travel lists are made during the course of the year to accommodate changed circumstances.

Offices consult with OIP as the need arises, to confirm that proposed international activities or requests are known to OIP management and considered to be useful and appropriate. If the activity is unfamiliar, involves a sensitive issue or country, or requires input from the Commission, the Department of State or other authority, OIP obtains authoritative guidance and provides it to the NRC staff.

### Foreign Travel Approvals

Each NRC staff-level foreign trip is individually reviewed and recommended by the traveler's supervisors and approved by the Office Director or Deputy Office Director/Regional Administrator, and concurred in by the Director, OIP. Reviewing officials are obliged to ensure that attendance at foreign conferences and meetings is relevant and valuable to agency interests. Also, the OIP Director is afforded the opportunity to alert travelers to any sensitive U.S. Government foreign policy matters, including international agreements or arrangements, that might be in conflict with the purpose of the travel. (Commissioner and Commission-Office foreign travel is reviewed and approved by the Chairman or his or her designee and reviewed by the Director, OIP.) All travel to countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States (the former Soviet Union) or other designated countries of concern is also subject to review by the Division of Facilities and Security in the Office of Administration (DFS/ADM).

The NRC Form 445 (Request for Approval of Official Foreign Travel) is used for review and approval purposes. It requires information identifying the traveler's position and office, the purpose of the travel, the persons with whom the travel has been coordinated, identification of other NRC travelers and contractors going to the same meeting or destination, the locations to be visited, the individuals to be contacted, the corresponding subjects of discussion, and a listing of individuals who will receive copies of trip reports. This form typically accompanies the NRC Form 279 (Official Travel Authorization) both of which are to be submitted by the traveler to his or her supervisor at least 30 days before foreign travel begins. In practice, the forms are often not processed until closer to the date of departure.

The NRC budget does not include a foreign travel funding ceiling although at least one office administers its own internal ceiling. The EDO and Program Office Directors take active steps to control the number of NRC-funded foreign trips from one year to the next. An allocation of such "core" foreign trips, based on need and priorities in support of office activities, has been set for each Program Office. Currently these allocations are 143 for RES, 61 for NRR, and 40 for NMSS. Any requirement to add a foreign core trip beyond the yearly allocation is individually justified in writing to the EDO.

### Staff Foreign Travel Funded by Outside Organizations

Proposed staff foreign travel paid by international organizations, foreign governments or other outside sources (e.g., Agency for International Development funds) is subject to the same approval and review process by OIP and the participating office as NRC-funded foreign travel. These trips are not, however, counted as core trips.

### Innovations to Promote Coordination in Advance of Foreign Travel

NMSS recently issued Policy and Procedures Letter 1-68, "Preparation for Foreign Travel" to help assure inter- and intra-Office coordination in advance of foreign travel by NMSS and contractor staff. The Letter requires an e-mail notice to interested NRC managers and staff giving the travel destination, time frame, and subject/purpose of the travel and requesting addressees to advise the traveler of any necessary background information or interests they would like pursued.

OIP and other recipients have found the NMSS e-mail notifications informative and useful. The e-mails are timely and can be easily forwarded to additional persons who are interested in assuring a productive and well-coordinated trip.

### Commission Policy Review and Guidance

Pursuant to Management Directive 3.9, all technical papers and other materials to be presented to international groups that involve policy issues must be submitted to the Commission for review before delivery.<sup>1</sup> Materials not involving policy issues are to be submitted to the Commission for information only.

### State Department and National Security Council Clearance of NRC Foreign Travel

U.S. Government personnel going on official foreign travel are required with few exceptions to obtain prior "country clearance" from the U.S. embassy in each host country. Country clearance involves an exchange of brief telegrams between the Department of State and the interested U.S. embassy(s). OIP supports the Commission and staff in this regard, but requires several working days of pre-departure notice to do so.

The NRC Chairman and other Commissioners going on official foreign travel are additionally obliged to inform the National Security Council and obtain prior concurrence of that office. OIP prepares the necessary correspondence to the NSC.

### Foreign Travel Trip Reports

NRC travelers are required to file a trip report within 30 days after returning, noting matters and information that in their judgement may have technical or administrative significance to the agency. Preparation and distribution of these reports have varied over time, but generally copies are to be sent to the Chairman or EDO, as appropriate, as well as to OIP, ADM (Security), and interested Program Offices.

Discussions in the IC have noted that the timeliness and distribution of trip reports are inconsistent and are not meeting the existing guidance in all cases. The IC discussed potential steps to improve staff awareness of and compliance with the foreign trip reporting requirements

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<sup>1</sup>This is an infrequent circumstance since the staff papers typically discuss information that is already available to the public.

and to consider possible changes in procedures to promote efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the needs of the agency. Such changes could include new procedures and organizational assignments to identify reported information of special interest to the Commission and to process, review, distribute, and catalog this information. The Weekly Information Report, internal E-mail, the NRC web sites, ADAMS, the NRC technical library and/or the Public Document Room have been variously suggested as having some increased role in handling of foreign trip reports and extracted or summarized information. A centralized collection of unclassified NRC trip reports and extracts could facilitate access to this information.

Also, Office Directors and other senior staff managers frequently arrange to brief Commissioners or other persons known to have an interest in the outcome of a particular trip or overseas meeting. Such briefings are usually scheduled within a week or two of returning to the office.

### Innovations to Enhance Foreign Trip Reporting

NMSS Policy and Procedures Letter 1-68 includes two innovations in respect to reporting. First, each NMSS traveler must prepare and distribute a one-page "quick look" report to appropriate recipients, including anyone who received the advance notice e-mail. Second, an executive summary is required with the full trip report, due thirty days after the trip is completed.

These enhancements promote timely and focused reports which are immediately useful to inform the Commission and NRC employees of the results of the subject trips and the possible opportunities or challenges ahead. Currently, some NMSS quick-look reports are included in the Weekly Information Report.

NRR notes that its trip reports are made concise and relevant to management by requiring that the traveler indicate whether the trip produced the information identified as its objective when the trip was authorized. This information is keyed to one or more of the four NRC performance goals, namely: to maintain safety, protection of the environment, and the common defense and security; to increase public confidence; to make NRC activities and decisions more effective, efficient, and realistic; and to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden on stakeholders.

### Review of Current Guidance

Recognizing the increase in NRC's international activities, the IC plans to conduct a review of the administration of foreign travel to identify necessary improvements and potential efficiencies. While the current guidance discusses various aspects of international activities, these activities involve judgement and decision criteria which are not clearly discussed. The IC review will include aspects such as criteria to improve consistency and transparency in selecting staff for international activities, linking activities to agency goals and objectives, and defining information to be provided to the Commission. The results could be forwarded to the Commission for review and comment and incorporated into a revised Management Directive.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Based on discussions involving various aspects of the staff's international activities, and

changes in this area over the past few years, the IC concludes that a more thorough review of existing guidance and practices should be conducted to identify improvements that would increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff's international activities, taking into consideration any further specific guidance the Commission provides to help satisfy its requirements. As appropriate, the IC would be prepared to discuss the results of its review with the Commission before the end of this fiscal year.

**COORDINATION:**

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