



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555

COMMISSIONER

August 5, 1999

MEMORANDUM TO: Chairman Dicus
Commissioner McGaffigan
Commissioner Merrifield

FROM: Commissioner Diaz 

SUBJECT: Meetings in Mexico

I traveled to Mexico July 18 - 23, 1999, to participate in an International Joint Meeting on Nuclear Safety and to see the Laguna Verde Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). This memorandum briefly describes the outcome of this visit.

On 18 July I met with the Acting Director for the Comision Nacional De Seguridad Nuclear Y Salvaguardias (CNSNS) Mr. Jose Luis Delgado Guardadato to discuss the various activities underway at Laguna Verde NPP. The next day I met with several Directors of CNSNS, including Deputy Director Ing. J. Raul Ortiz Magana, Dr. Sergio Waller Majia and former Director of CNSNS and now general Manager of the NPP Ing. Miguel Medina. Our discussions focused on the Laguna Verde NPP and Ing. Medina's transition as the permanent General Manager. He stated changes are already underway, including frank and open discussions between staff and managers on nuclear safety issues. He is trying to make day-to-day activities at the NPP more transparent to both the public and the press. Sunday evening I attended a reception with high level officials from Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Columbia, Mexico, Canada, Germany, France, and the U.S. This meeting built a foundation for future discussions held during the conference.

On Monday 19 July the Governor of the State of Guerrero opened the Conference and gave the opening remarks. Don. Luis Echavarry, Director of the OECD/NEA, gave the first plenary session paper and I followed with a presentation on "Radiological Safety and National Interests." The content and direct manner in which the paper was presented was noticeably appreciated by the audience. Several technical break-out groups, including Nuclear Energy and the Environment, and Materials Engineering, were conducted that afternoon.

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I also met with Dr. Jaime Pahissa Campa, who was named Director of the Argentinian Nuclear Regulatory Authority two months ago. He replaced Dr. Dan Dennison, who is now the President of the Comision Nacional De Energia Atomica in Argentina (similar to the AEC). Our discussions focused on changes currently underway in Argentina and he encouraged me to visit Argentina during my next visit to the region.

A separate dinner was hosted Monday evening by CNSNS. It included several CNSNS Directors and Mr. Juan Eibenschutz (who was the Director of the Electric Commission and is considered one of the most powerful figures in the Mexican nuclear industry). Topics of discussion included the importance of an independent regulator and how the U.S. NRC functions as an independent agency.

Tuesday 20 July I attended several technical meetings and met with Dr. Andrew C. Kadak, President of the ANS. We had the opportunity to discuss several nuclear safety issues and the on-going work of the ANS. In a separate meeting I suggested to the Latin American and U.S. representatives discussing the organization of an International Conference on Nuclear Energy (ICONE), to be held in Baltimore in 2000, that they consider stopping by the NRC after the conference. Ms. Olga Simbalista, the International Coordinator for the Electric Commission in Brazil, requested that I attend Brazil's international conference assembled to celebrate the 500th Anniversary of Brazil.

On Wednesday 21 July, the Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environmental issues closed the meeting on behalf of Dr. Luis Tellez Kuenzler, Minister of Energy. He and I met afterwards, with other officials, to discuss how the presence of a strong regulator could actually improve productivity and nuclear safety at an NPP.

Mr. Lawrence Kerr, Attaché at the American Embassy in Mexico City, also attended the conference. We discussed the Embassy concern over the lack of a low or medium level waste facility. Mr. Kerr explained that the selected site will probably not be used to house low or medium level waste, as planned, because the aquifer where Mexico City gets its water is right underneath the site. Since there is no national repository, Mexico is relying on localized storage. (Storage at the NPP is about full but they believe they have adequate space for additional storage modules).

On Thursday 22 July I went to Laguna Verde NPP with Director Delgado and Consejero J.M. Azuero from Spain. The NPP looked clean and well maintained. A staff meeting with all the managers of the NPP was held and actual performance of the plant was discussed. I was requested to discuss directly with the staff how there is no conflict between having a strong independent regulatory body and strong operators that both emphasize safety. General Manager Medina asked detailed questions about risk-informed regulations and requested that we continue our dialogue in the coming weeks.

I briefly discussed the SRM (COMNJD-99-004) with our Mexican counterparts, who reacted positively to the initiatives and stated that they will forward a response the first week in August.

I believe this was a very productive and successful trip.