



NRC NEWS

U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs

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No. S-03-018

NEI EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND COMMUNICATIONS INFORMATION FORUM

Keynote Panel Remarks

by

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Commissioner
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission**

**June 9, 2003
Key Biscayne, Florida**

Good morning everyone. I am delighted to be here today and delighted to join my distinguished co-panelists Angie and Art.

Many of you may know that I am in the last month of what has been a seven year run as a Commissioner. It has been a wonderful seven years and many of you, here today, have directly and indirectly contributed to my success and, most importantly, contributed to the success of the industry and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in protecting public health and safety. So, thank you.

Many of you may also know that my background is in radiation biology and before joining the NRC, I was Director of Radiation Control and Emergency Management at the Arkansas Department of Health for nine years and conducted research in radiation health effects at Harvard Medical School, Rice University, and the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School.

I have been on both sides of the fence and can recall, as Arkansas Director of Emergency Management thinking how intractable the NRC was. Now as a NRC Commissioner, I see how immovable some States can be. I concluded that instead of focusing on solving each others problems, it might just be easier for all of us to focus on EPA. Is there anyone here from EPA? Just kidding !!

As I reflect on where we were in emergency planning and communication and compare that to where we are today, there have been some significant changes. Fast-breakers, KI, and security to name a few. We are better today, no question about that.

But the world today is more complex. Technology has advanced, our understanding of risk and vulnerabilities has improved, the public has become more involved, and the push for regulatory efficiency has become a theme. We are now dealing with emergency planning in a backdrop of potential malicious acts and uncertainty. All significant challenges individually, and together, these challenges present a daunting task.

To be sure, however, the focus of emergency planning has not changed. The focus of our emergency planning remains to protect public health and safety. It can be regarded as the last layer in our defense-in-depth strategy and if called upon must not fail. I know you have and will continue to meet the challenges before you simply because, as some have said, “failure is not an option”.

I would like to share with you some impressions about elements of effective emergency planning and preparedness. Three elements that I would like to focus on are relationship and communication, management support, and the need to always look forward.

Relationship and Communication

The panel discussions over the next few days , I think, will be particularly helpful in framing some of the more important contemporary challenges before us. Few could have envisioned the sweeping impact that the events of September 11th had on security, emergency preparedness, and plant operations.

Even fewer could have been prepared for the unfolding and still developing complex relationships that are essential to functioning effectively in a post- September 11th environment. The key to building and maintaining these strong relationships is to continue to ensure that they are built on truth, trust, communication and mutual respect.

The post-September 11th security and safeguards environment has strained many relationships. NRC has strained relationships with many of its stakeholders, in part, because, the nature of dealing with sensitive security-related information often necessitates implementing NRC processes outside of public purview. When this happens, communication wanes and trust is more difficult to maintain.

Many of you may have new relationships with the community, law enforcement, and other government agencies as a result of the response to the events of September 11th. The challenge is to forge these new relationships in a meaningful manner while building on the foundation of previous relationships. As with any life-changing event, there is potential for profound positive outcomes. I believe that all parties will emerge from this with a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and, ultimately, different and better relationships.

Just last year, I attended the security-related table top exercise at Fort Calhoun Nuclear Power Station just outside of Omaha, Nebraska. One afternoon session was devoted to an interactive forum with local law enforcement, armed forces representatives, federal law enforcement agencies, and emergency planning folks from the site and from Nebraska and Iowa.

It was truly an epiphany to see how far we have come in a short time since September 11th, yet how far we still need to go. It was important for all to understand how resources may be diverted from assigned emergency planning activities if a security-related event were to occur. It was critical to re-validate communication links, to ensure communication protocols are in place, and to understand decision-making roles and responsibilities.

My experience at Ft Calhoun further reinforced my long held beliefs, which took root when I was Director of Emergency Management in Arkansas, that communications are key during an emergency. Both communication to direct and mitigate the event and communication to members of the public must be clear and relevant. Communication is almost always a challenge. If the challenge is not in establishing communications, it is communicating clearly and ensuring the fidelity of the message as it passes through layers and branches of the organization and to members of the public.

I am sure I am preaching to the choir when it comes to the importance of communications. But in a post September 11th world, it cannot be overemphasized. Communication with all stakeholders is paramount.

Management and Government Support

Emergency planning will not be successful unless there is deep-rooted management support and support of local and State governments. Emergency planning is a team effort. We can learn a lot just by examining some contemporary issues around some of the nations nuclear facilities.

I understand that Art will talk about the malicious turkey at the Seabrook facility. We can chuckle about it today, it was a not so serious event but one that seriously challenged our coordination and communication. There are many lessons learned that I hope will improve future emergency planning, response and communication. The NRC is still considering hiring the turkey to assist in our security and emergency preparedness drills !!

Another example of how crucial it is to have management and government support involves the circumstances surrounding emergency planning at the Indian Point plants. Around Indian Point, some local governments did not provide the necessary information for the Federal Emergency Management Agency to complete its review processes. We all know that licensees get “dinged” when the State and local governments do not perform well during an emergency exercise. But it is rare when some segments of government seemingly refuse to participate. In this case, unfortunately, emergency planning is gridlocked at the intersection of safety and security and politics is the erratic traffic light.

Despite the new challenges, there are numerous bright spots in emergency planning and communication post September 11th. I mentioned my observation of a security related table-top exercise and forum at Ft. Calhoun. Within the last year, I also visited the Cooper, Farley, and South Texas Project nuclear power plants. Each one of these plants, as I am confident the vast majority of plants, have strong working relationships with local law enforcement, with the local community, and with federal partners. When I visited South Texas for example, I met with the local sheriff, the local County judge, and a representative from the Houston FBI office. An impressive network of cooperation that was not strained by the events of September 11th, but instead was strengthened.

I challenge each of you to evaluate these support and communication networks. Is there a larger role for you to play in stimulating two-way communication among stakeholders, for example? Are you doing enough outreach to the community?

Looking Forward

I have mentioned some significant changes in the emergency planning arena and how, recently, many of these changes have been related to the emerging interrelationship between security and emergency planning. But there are many other challenges ahead that have taken a back seat because of the challenges of the last 15 months.

For example, the industry and NRC are beginning to exercise the early site permit process -- a key element of licensing a new nuclear power plant. All three sites currently under consideration are associated with existing nuclear power plant sites. One of the underlying thoughts behind this rationale is that it would be much easier to site a new plant where one is already sited, in part, because an emergency planning infrastructure is already approved and in-place.

Siting a new plant at an existing NPP site is a deliberate process. It does not, however, exercise all aspects of the early site permit process that might be involved in siting a nuclear power plant on a new site.

Siting a new plant on a new site is a significant challenge and one that will rightly need to build on successes. Once we have learned lessons from the initial early site permit reviews, we

must prepare for the more complex emergency planning and communications challenges associated with a new site.

One aspect of emergency planning for new reactors that also may apply to currently operating reactors is the concept of a reduced source term. Some of the newer designs have such low source terms that policy questions arise about whether we can have smaller emergency planning zones or even whether we need to have a containment. I have always believed that our rules and regulations must be based on good science. In this case, however, I am not sure science will prevail quickly because I am uncertain whether the American public can accept nuclear power plants without containment or without emergency plans beyond the site boundary.

Of a more immediate nature are some of the challenges associated with changes in roles and responsibilities that have resulted from the formation of the new Department of Homeland Security. We recently completed a national exercise, TOPOFF2, and there are emerging lessons learned that may have some impact on emergency planning and communications.

We are currently reviewing Revision 11 of the draft Initial National Response Plan and are considering additional requirements for updating NRC's emergency plans and federal interagency plans. These updates will be submitted to the Secretary of Homeland Security. The extent of these changes is still unknown. It is still too early to tell.

It also seems as if we deal weekly with new legislative proposals. Some of these proposals are rooted in response to the events of September 11th, some more explicitly linked to issues at a specific site, and others more closely tied to defining roles and responsibilities between the newly formed Department of Homeland Security and other federal and state agencies. Regardless of the motivation, it is essential that everyone understand the dynamic nature of the emergency planning-related environment. My crystal ball is no better than your crystal ball and it is critical that you stay engaged and provide input into the processes by which some of these changes may occur.

Conclusion

Thank you for inviting me to this important forum. I wish you all the best in future endeavors. I look forward to the interesting agenda before us and look forward to continuing the dialogue with you throughout the forum.