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THE NRC AND YOU

BY

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As the title of my talk indicates, I would like to speak to you on the subject of “The NRC and You”. You, the current NRC Interns. You, the future NRC leaders.

Before I speak about “you”, I would like to speak about the NRC - about us. The NRC is a regulatory agency. We enable the use of nuclear power and nuclear materials where, when and how they can be used safely and securely. That is basically what the Atomic Energy Act instructs us to do. The Congress and the President, and the market place establish the social value of electrical power, medical and industrial applications. We establish the requirements and oversight programs that constrain those uses in a manner that provides for safety and security. If we do not establish the necessary requirements, then safety or security problems will arise. If we establish too many unnecessary requirements, the social value of the activity will be diminished or lost.

It was Oscar Wilde, the author and playwright, who remarked that, “The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple.” The regulatory process is rarely pure and never simple. It is a constant struggle to discover and decide what is in the best interest of our society - in the best interest of the American people. And it is a constant struggle to communicate those discoveries and decisions to the people.

Let me spend a few minutes discussing how those philosophical thoughts get translated into real, regulatory programs. I believe that every successful regulatory program relies on a “Safety Construct”,

a set of essential elements that define and support the regulatory processes. When I look at regulatory programs around the world, I see many different activities but all tied to some common ideas of what a good regulatory program needs to be. A safety construct, including the requisite regulatory components, is much more than a set of “do’s and don’ts”; it should be a positive force, a roadmap, a pathway to helping the industry accomplish its proposed uses of nuclear technologies, tempered by the regulatory mission to achieve a better, safer and more secure existence for the American people. Another characteristic of a safety construct is that it interacts with the best design, operation, and maintenance practices of the industry, and utilizes the law, and is therefore a two-edged sword; to enable and to correct according to well established and transparent principles.

I see the “Safety Construct” of a good regulatory program as including the following essential elements:

- 1) An open society with a strong technological infrastructure,
- 2) Goals (safety goals and strategic goals),
- 3) Integrated quality systems,
- 4) A commitment to safety and security and,
- 5) A strong, credible regulator, and a strong regulatory program

A strong safety construct leads to good, realistically conservative regulations and a healthy oversight program. It results in regulations and programs that will naturally develop and mature with operating experience and research findings. The regulations and programs change while the basic safety construct remains the same.

I will address each of the elements in the safety construct briefly:

First and most fundamental is an open society with a healthy technology infrastructure. This refers to the people, programs, and facilities necessary to support the implementation of a complex technology. For example, it requires an open, stable society, governed by the rule of law to allow the free flow of information. It also requires national (and sometimes international) consensus codes & standards and information systems such as technical publications and conferences, computers and libraries. These examples are building blocks of a modern technological society and they are part of the necessary foundation for the safe and secure use of nuclear energy and nuclear materials.

The second essential element is a set of goals to clearly articulate what the regulatory program intends to achieve. This element relates to “What” needs to be achieved.

No program can hope to succeed if it doesn’t know what it is supposed to achieve. Not only do the goals need to be clear, they also need to reflect current social values, and need to be informed by technical information and analysis. The implementation of these goals must include a realistic assessment and management of risk; and must include an assessment of uncertainties; that is, an assessment of what is known and what is not known. The NRC

has safety goals for nuclear reactors and is developing similar ideas for the materials and waste program.

The third essential element relates to “How” things need to be done. They need to be done well and that is accomplished through a fully integrated quality systems. Where “fully integrated” means that it must address:

- Design (engineered for safety),
- Construction,
- Operation (including training),
- Security,
- Maintenance,
- Monitoring (of programs, people, and performance),
- Assessment (of risk & performance), and
- Corrective Actions.

The fourth element is a commitment to safety and security. Some people like to talk about “safety culture”, but “commitment to safety” is what it really means. This commitment to safety must include a desire to do things right the first time. It must include a strong questioning attitude and a receptiveness to questioning attitudes. It includes a willingness and an ability to learn and a willingness to invest in safety and security.

A commitment to safety always starts at the top of an organization. I can assure you that as Chairman, I am fully committed to the safety and security of the American public and I expect each one of you to be fully committed to that goal also.

The fifth essential element in a safety construct is a strong, credible regulator and a strong regulatory program. That’s us, the NRC. That’s you and me. We need to be regulators with integrity and commitment to public service; with independence, objectivity and openness; with technical capability and credibility; with the legal authority to act when necessary; and with moral authority to influence licensees to act in the public interest.

In support of these characteristics, we need access to information from licensees and applicants. That includes information submitted to us and information from direct inspections.

These then are the essential elements of a good regulatory process. You can see that the NRC safety and security programs have these characteristics, as do the regulatory programs of many other nations. In fact, this safety construct can be a useful tool when comparing the regulatory activities of different nations. One area in which this is an important consideration is the question of how future reactor design approvals in one country can be used in other countries. The world is becoming smaller and smaller with increased communications and with more and more multinational corporations. The idea of a safety construct that is universally recognized and respected may be a significant tool in addressing international as well as national safety and security matters.

I said that I would speak of the NRC and you. So I should say a few words about you, the NRC interns. From the elements listed above, you should be able to see your essential role, as regulators, and how that role fits into the overall safety construct.

To this agency, you interns are a breath of fresh air. We need your energy, enthusiasm, and new ideas. You are the future, the future of this agency. Of course we expect dedication and hard work in helping the agency accomplish its mission of ensuring the safety and security of the public. But we also expect that the agency's mission will be accomplished in a manner that is consistent with NRC's Organizational Values. Those Values ...

Integrity,
Excellence,
Service,
Respect,
Cooperation,
Commitment, and
Openness,

... are essential to this agency's success. What we do and how we do it are both important. What you do and how you do it are both important. That's my message for today. I have every confidence that you will serve this agency and the American public well and honorably, now and in the future.