



NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE

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June 30, 2006

Mr. James E. Dyer  
Director  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, DC 20555-0001

**SUBJECT:** Safety Culture Initiative Implementation

**PROJECT NUMBER: 689**

Dear Mr. Dyer:

On July 1, regulatory changes resulting from the NRC's safety culture initiative will be incorporated into the Reactor Oversight Process (ROP). Because this initiative represents a significant revision to the ROP, it is important that both NRC and industry closely monitor initial implementation and make adjustments as necessary to ensure the intended goals are achieved. In this regard, this letter discusses some of the challenges we see during the initial months of implementation.

Many of the documents associated with the safety culture initiative were just recently made publicly available or will not be available until after July 1. Revisions to all but one of the inspection procedures and manual chapters that incorporate the safety culture initiative became publicly available on June 22. It is our understanding that the Regulatory Issue Summary that discusses the transition issues associated with the initiative is scheduled to be available before the end of July. Given these circumstances, it will take the industry some time to digest and understand the changes. Licensees also will need time to reflect the regulatory expectations contained in these documents in their own plant programs. While completing these activities in parallel with inspections is not ideal, it will provide an opportunity for both NRC and industry to examine and learn from the process under active engagement. The industry will collect licensee feedback from NRC inspection exit meetings to support discussions on initial implementation of the initiative this fall.

We previously have expressed concern about the lack of a mechanism to screen out cross-cutting aspects of low significance in the ROP. Since 2003, there has been a

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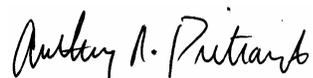
substantial increase in the percentage of findings with an associated cross-cutting aspect, while the vast majority of findings have minimal or low safety significance.

Cross-cutting aspects initiate assessments against attributes of safety culture in the revised process. NRC staff resources as well as licensee resources will be impacted by the volume of input to the process, potentially diverting attention to issues that have little impact on safety. We believe that the development of a mechanism to screen out cross-cutting aspects with low significance, similar to that developed to address minor findings, must be addressed.

The industry is also concerned by the low threshold for identification of a substantive cross-cutting issue in the area of safety conscious work environment (SCWE). The threshold is one inspection finding in the current 12-month assessment period with a documented cross-cutting aspect in the area of SCWE. A single occurrence, in isolation from other substantive data, does not support the determination of a trend or a broader conclusion regarding organizational performance. While additional criteria must be met, these criteria are qualitative and subjective. We believe a more reasonable threshold, with more definitive criteria, should be developed. This also will make the treatment of this cross-cutting area more consistent with the other cross-cutting areas of the ROP.

In closing, we support a thorough examination and open discussion of issues and concerns as the safety culture initiative is incorporated into the ROP. We will continue to use the monthly ROP working group interactions with the staff as one of the means to accomplish this during the planned 18 month implementation period. In addition, we support additional stakeholder interactions with NRC staff during the national and regional utility group meetings starting this August and continuing this fall. We look forward to our continuing dialogue to ensure that the safety culture initiative achieves its intended goals.

Sincerely,



Anthony R. Pietrangelo

c: Mr. Luis A. Reyes, NRC  
Mr. William F. Kane, NRC  
Mr. Michael R. Johnson, NRC  
Mr. Bruce A. Boger, NRC  
Mr. Stuart A. Richards, NRC