



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. S-07-006

“The Future of Safety Culture Regulation ”

**Prepared Remarks
by the Honorable Gregory B. Jaczko
Commissioner
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission**

**at the
Employee Concerns Program Forum
Charleston, S.C.**

February 13, 2007

Good morning. I would like to thank the Employees Concerns Program Forum for the opportunity to be here today. This forum gives me an opportunity to speak to various licensee, legal, and government professionals working together since the 1980s to promote healthy work environments and a strong safety culture at our nation’s nuclear power plants.

I want to focus today on safety culture, which we have defined along with the international community to be “that assembly of characteristics and attitudes in organizations and individuals which establishes that, as an overriding priority, nuclear safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance.”

Which reminds me of a story about an anonymous safety concern at a to-remain-nameless nuclear power plant. The site vice president at this plant was dedicated to safety culture and took these concerns very seriously. He desperately wanted to talk to the person to find out more about the safety issue to ensure it was resolved, so he called all the employees together as a group and asked the author to identify himself. Now, there are a couple of different ways to look at this situation. If there was really a strong safety culture climate at this plant, the concerned employee would have an incentive to jump up and enthusiastically claim authorship of the letter so that he or she could be appropriately congratulated and rewarded for identifying an issue that if left

unchecked, could have potentially led to an unsafe working environment. On the other hand, if the safety culture at this plant was not so strong, the site VP's actions could in and of themselves be seen as retaliatory and intimidating. And if we focus for a quick moment on the fact that the concern was raised anonymously, I think we have our answer.

The point of my story is that in some ways safety culture is one of the most complex areas we regulate. There are at least two sides to the story and it is sometimes difficult to decide exactly where to draw the appropriate line between management issues that are the responsibility of licensees and health and safety issues that require an NRC oversight role. But there certainly is a strong role for the regulator in this area. After all, licensees face sometimes competing pressures to stay focused on safety while also attempting to generate electricity and be profitable enterprises. The NRC has the benefit of having a simpler and more straightforward mandate: public health and safety.

And just because regulating safety culture is not easy does not mean it is not important. As a regulator, I care about safety culture, because we generally find evidence of a deteriorating safety culture at facilities that have experienced safety problems. I believe we should do more to develop the performance measures that identify weaknesses in the safety culture and promote strengths before problems emerge. That is why I was very supportive of the effort to incorporate safety culture into the reactor oversight process.

Our staff worked diligently and collaboratively last year with all stakeholders, including licensees, public interest groups and members of Congress, to develop a method to address safety culture as part of the Reactor Oversight Process. We all agreed we must reinforce a culture in which everyone feels empowered, emboldened, and encouraged to ask the next question, the difficult question, and not to simply accept what is presented to them.

The development of consensus on this effort is no small feat and serves as a real testament to the value of public participation in the work of the NRC. The staff published a Regulatory Issue Summary (2006-13), and initial implementation of this initiative began last summer. I understand that while it may still be too early to make a final judgement about the effectiveness of the ROP revisions, things are going well. The NRC's Dave Vito will be going into more detail on the status of the effort, but I would like to mention that I am pleased the staff has continued their diligent efforts to make this work by focusing on inspector training and by reaching out to stakeholders through workshops, surveys, and monthly meetings. Of course, a big test will come when and if, because of serious performance issues, we are compelled to place a plant in column four of the ROP action matrix. According to the changes in Inspection Procedure 95003, at that point the licensee and the NRC will be required to perform a full safety culture assessment, among other steps.

As important as the progress I have mentioned is, I think we must still do more. The next logical step is for the Commission to issue a formal policy statement on the importance of safety culture. The Commission's 1989 Policy Statement on the "Conduct of Nuclear Power Plant Operations" contains a reference to safety culture but is limited in scope and focuses mainly on conduct at reactors. A 1996 policy statement on the "The Freedom of Employees in the Nuclear Industry to Raise Safety Concerns Without Fear of Retaliation" is good and served as the

foundation for the development of an important attribute of safety culture - “a safety conscious work environment.”

Now is the time for the Commission to take a broader view of the overall issue of safety culture, taking advantage of the much better understanding of what it means and how important it is, and set clear expectations for all of our licensees, not just reactors operators.

This last point is important. I gave a speech last month at a Nuclear Fuel Supply Forum in Washington, D.C., where I proposed that the NRC develop an oversight regime for fuel cycle facilities that is more risk-informed and objective, in short more like the reactor oversight process. Such a structured oversight process would be more consistent, clear and predictable. The Commission has started down this road by requiring licensees to submit integrated safety assessments (ISAs). Since ISAs identify items relied on for safety and provide details of the consequences of accidents, the NRC staff could leverage this information to develop performance indicators. Therefore, the ISAs would help facilitate the creation of a more structured oversight program for fuel facilities. I acknowledged that developing such a program will be difficult because fuel cycle facilities are unique.

But the fact that the regulatory regimes are currently so different presents a real challenge for how we extend the progress made in incorporating the attributes of safety culture into our oversight of reactor licensees into our oversight of materials licensees, where it is equally as important. Development of a safety culture policy statement would help clarify expectations for all of licensees and help our staff determine the best way to proceed in both the reactor materials arenas. I want to continue to encourage the crucial stakeholders in attendance here today, many of whom have assumed responsibility for implementing the safety culture changes to the ROP, to stay fully engaged with the NRC.

And at the NRC, we also must redouble our efforts to foster initiatives that seek to further a strong safety culture within our own staff. It is just as important that we set the example for the industry we regulate. This is why I am such a strong supporter of programs such as differing professional opinions and the new non-concurrence process. These important programs seek to uphold the NRC’s priority of maintaining a working environment that encourages employees to make known their best professional judgments even though they may differ from the prevailing staff view, disagree with a management decision or policy position, or take issue with a proposed or established agency practice involving technical, legal, or policy issues.

It really comes down to respect for differing views and alternative approaches. Even at the NRC there is sometimes a tendency to seek consensus on matters that reasonable people can disagree about. Our staff sometimes gets tangled up by efforts to resolve differences of opinion on policy issues that could more efficiently be presented to the Commission to decide. Ultimately the Commission is stronger and more respected if the public clearly sees there is a healthy dialogue and debate occurring over the complex public policy decisions we make.

I look forward to continuing to push for stronger regulation of safety culture among all NRC licensees and a continued focus at the agency itself. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, this is not a simple issue but a vital one. A policy statement developed through public

input and participation would move the agency an important step forward. I appreciate the efforts of everyone at this forum to contribute to work environments focused on public health and safety, and would welcome any questions you may have.