



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON NUCLEAR WASTE & MATERIALS
WASHINGTON, DC 20555 - 0001

ACNWR-0265

July 27, 2007

The Honorable Dale E. Klein
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555-0001

SUBJECT: AGENCY EFFORTS REGARDING RADIATION PROTECTION
INFORMATION

Dear Chairman Klein:

On June 20, 2007, at the 180th meeting of the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste and Materials (the Committee), Mr. David McIntyre, from the Office of Public Affairs (OPA), briefed the Committee on the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) program regarding outreach on radiation. He described the NRC's efforts to inform the public about the health effects of low-dose radiation exposure and to elicit the public's perceptions of radiation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Public outreach information on the NRC Web site should be organized to better respond to questions typically raised by the public. Activities to reorganize information for the public should complement the current structure of the Web site.

The agency should develop and proactively disseminate non-Web-based materials supporting agency actions to targeted audiences.

The agency should continue to use focus groups to evaluate the effectiveness of NRC public outreach activities.

OBSERVATIONS

Mr. McIntyre reported that NRC outreach focuses on the agency's mission to protect people and the environment. He also noted that every office has a public outreach program, not only OPA. The Committee also learned that the goal of OPA is to ensure openness in the NRC's regulatory process by making clear, accurate information available in a timely manner to the news media and the public about the NRC's policies, decisions, programs, and activities. Representatives from OPA typically serve as the points of contact for the press, persons from other media, and the public. The office focuses on areas such as preparing responses to public inquiries; supporting agency public meetings; and developing information for dissemination via the Web, videos, brochures, and fact sheets.

Mr. McIntyre reported that both the agency and the office seek to become the public's first choice as a source for information regarding radiation protection. In conclusion, Mr. McIntyre presented examples of information currently available on the NRC Web site and on other Web sites. He reported that OPA, with support from the Office of Federal and State Materials and Environmental Management Programs, has begun efforts to revamp the Web site and to make radiation protection information readily available and easily accessible.

The Committee reviewed the following related NRC publications:

- NUREG/BR-0308, "Effective Risk Communications," January 2004
- NUREG/BR-0322, "Radiation Protection and the NRC," February 2006
- Fact Sheet, "Biological Effects of Radiation," December 2004
- Fact Sheet, "Radiation Monitoring at Nuclear Power Plants and the 'Tooth Fairy' Issue," January 2005
- Fact Sheet, "Tritium, Radiation Protection Limits, and Drinking Water Standards," July 2006
- Backgrounder, "Radiation Protection and the 'Tooth Fairy' Issue," December 2004
- the agency Web site at <http://www.nrc.gov> and various sub pages discussed below

Currently, the header buttons on the home page are organized according to the regulatory areas and the organization's structure. The agency should consider adding a header button labeled Radiation Information that would link to a page that reflects a focus on questions asked by members of the public. Educational materials could also be organized under these key questions and issues.

The NRC's outreach program focuses on the use of Web-based tools. The staff develops and uses written materials (pamphlets, brochures, fact sheets) in support of specific agency actions. The agency has no system for the targeted distribution of information related to radiation protection through school systems, libraries, or other outlets readily accessible to members of the public.

The staff currently evaluates the effectiveness of the NRC's public outreach program by discussing "lessons learned" at staff meetings held after public meetings. The program offices usually conduct the meetings and then apply the "lessons learned." The agency has attempted to assess national changes in attitudes using focus groups.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Michael T. Ryan
Chairman

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