



NRC NEWS

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Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

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“Resolving Fire Protection Issues”

Prepared Statement for

**The Honorable Gregory B. Jaczko
Commissioner
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission**

at a

**Public Meeting with Stakeholders
Raleigh, North Carolina**

October 16, 2007

I want to thank you for meeting with me today to engage in a dialogue on the important subject of improving the protection of nuclear power plants from fires. The NRC’s technical analyses tell us that the risk of fire is a significant contributor to safety concerns at nuclear plants and this an issue that must be resolved.

Today, fire protection regulations for the existing fleet of nuclear reactors are an unwieldy and confusing patchwork of requirements frequently resulting in too many exemptions and manual operator actions. I have been to several reactor sites which have good separation between safety components, and thus much simpler fire protection strategies. I have also visited sites where licensees need to request numerous exemptions from existing regulations and in turn take compensatory actions. This is not the ideal, most transparent, or safest way to deal with the issue.

Since much of the existing fleet was not built with modern fire protection standards in mind, it is important to focus on safety and address these exemptions to our existing regulations. Although it is a voluntary alternative, I believe 10 CFR 48 (c), the NFPA 805 fire protection rule, is the best solution we have today to reduce the need for exemptions and improve safety.

NFPA 805 is a good example of a beneficial risk-informed regulation that can use fire protection risk insights to enhance safety. One benefit of the program is that the NRC and

licensees undertake a more comprehensive evaluation of a plant's entire fire protection programs. Any problems discovered through this process must be resolved.

I therefore believe adopting NFPA 805 should be mandatory for those plants with fire protection issues. Because current Commission policy is that this change is only voluntary, I have been strongly encouraging licensees to invest the resources and make the change. In addition, the NRC has been actively working to make improvements in many areas of fire protection such as manual operator actions, post-fire safe shutdown circuit analysis, fire barriers, fire modeling, and fire research.

I am constantly impressed with the expertise and dedication of the NRC staff who are working to finally resolve this longstanding and complex issue. The NRC continues to be a world leader in understanding the problems posed by fire at nuclear plants, coming up with solutions, and working to resolve all of the technical challenges. Through the agency's research efforts, the NRC is showing the way forward on this issue and licensees must now follow.

I look forward to your thoughts and comments on how the NRC can continue working to improve fire protection at nuclear power plants across the country.

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