June 24, 2008

MEMORANDUM TO: Stephen D. Dingbaum
Assistant Inspector General for Audits

FROM: Eric J. Leeds, Director ***/RA by JWiggins for/***
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

SUBJECT: STATUS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL'S AUDIT ON THE GENERIC COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM (OIG-05-A-19)

I am responding to your April 4, 2008, memorandum requesting a status update on Recommendations 1, 3, and 4. With respect to your specific recommendations, I submit the following updates:

Recommendation 1

Include safeguards advisories, as well as any other agency communication tool that meets the definition of a generic communication, in the formal Generic Communications Program to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

Status

The staff has completed work on draft Management Directive (MD) 8.18, "NRC Generic Communications Program" which was submitted to the Commission for formal approval on December 7, 2007. This MD establishes security advisories and Information Assessment Team Advisories as additional agency generic communications products. This MD defines the scope of U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) generic communications and defines organizational roles and responsibilities for each generic communications product. MD 8.18 explicitly defines NRC's generic communications only as the generic communications products established therein. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) received a copy of the draft as required by procedure.

The staff received Commission feedback on June 10, 2008, and is currently addressing these comments. The staff expects to resolve these comments and receive Commission approval of the MD by the end August 2008.

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Recommendation 3

Implement controls to ensure a systematic, consistent tracking methodology from initiation to closure for each agency-issued generic communication.

Response

As noted in our previous responses to this recommendation, the staff established an interoffice (Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response, and Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation) working group to (a) evaluate the current process for initiating, developing, tracking, and distributing generic communications, and (b) recommend how this process should be amended.

The working group completed its evaluation of existing agency tools for developing an agency-wide tracking system for generic communications and concluded that no such tool exists. The Office of Information Systems (OIS) consulted, supported, and offered related assistance on developing a new information technology application for the agency-wide tracking of generic communications. The working group staff and OIS co-produced the scoping documents. On October 19, 2006, the working group submitted the application development request to OIS.

OIS completed their review and presented alternatives for the generic communications database and it was decided that the database would be incorporated into the project plan for a database that will be used to track and store requests for additional information (licensee responses and inquiries). This system includes capabilities for collaborative discussion threads and for tracking postings of reviewers' queries to the industry and the responses to such inquiries. The initiation phase of the project began in June of 2007 and the Generic Communication Branch (PGCB) worked with the software developers to develop the database requirements and workflow process. In November of 2007, the PGCB began providing input to the software developers to support development of the prototype database.

Prototype development for the agency-wide tracking system for bulletins and generic letters has been completed. The developers commenced system testing in June 2008. Acceptance testing is currently scheduled to commence in August 2008.

The staff expects to implement the agency-wide tracking system which provides more detailed tracking for bulletins and generic letters by the end of calendar year 2008. Agency-wide tracking for regulatory issue summaries, security advisories, and information notices will continue on the generic communications web page.

Recommendation 4

Direct the development of a methodology that will allow the staff to gauge the effectiveness of agency-issued generic communications.

Response

The staff has completed work on draft MD 8.18, “NRC Generic Communications Program” which was submitted to the Commission for formal approval on December 7, 2007. This MD establishes the roles and responsibilities for the conduct of effectiveness reviews and clearly identifies those generic communications that require effectiveness reviews. The OIG received a copy of the draft as required by procedure.

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