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“Enhancing Nuclear Safety Databases”

**Prepared Remarks of NRC Chairman Dale E. Klein
IAEA Conference**

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I am very pleased to be here. I arrived in India on Tuesday, and already it has been a very interesting trip. I am looking forward to a productive conference.

The theme I was asked to speak on is “The Role of National Regulators in Promoting Nuclear Safety.” I have a few general observations to make on that subject, as well as one specific proposal or idea that I would like to put forth for your consideration today.

Before I turn to those points, however, let me take a brief moment to repeat something I said at the IAEA General Conference in Vienna last month. At that meeting, I congratulated the IAEA’s International Safety Group for two new reports it had just released. One was about “National Nuclear Installation Safety Infrastructure” and the other was on the subject of “Improving the International System for Operating Experience Feedback.” I want to return to the theme of operating experience later in my remarks, but for now let me note that both of these documents are very valuable tools. Naturally, they will be useful for helping new entrants into the field of nuclear energy learn from the experience of other nations. But I think these reports also serve a useful purpose for advanced nuclear nations, by reminding us about the fundamental goals of good regulatory oversight; and that we must adapt and be flexible in order to meet those goals. The NRC, for instance, recognizes that the current wave of license applications for new nuclear power plants in the U.S. is occurring under very different circumstances compared to when the existing operating reactors were built – in large part because the nuclear supply chain is now very different. In my view, every responsible regulator must recognize that the world is changing, and that our regulatory practices and procedures must adapt to meet those changes.

Again, in the case of my own agency, we have recognized that the global supply chain requires us to be more actively involved in communicating and interacting with other national regulatory bodies. The example I mentioned at the Senior Regulators Meeting in Vienna was the cooperative effort under way between the U.S. and China regarding the AP1000 reactors that China has purchased. Since the U.S. had already certified this reactor design, this presented an

opportunity for us to work together and share information about the similarities and differences in the U.S. and Chinese regulatory processes and inspection methodologies. As part of this effort, when fabrication of specialized components begins, the U.S. will send vendor inspectors to China to observe how these components are fabricated. And, in turn, the U.S. welcomes teams from China, and other nations, to observe inspections of American manufacturers.

I have often mentioned how vendor inspections are regarded as a valuable regulatory tool at the NRC. A U.S. regulation called Part 21, requires that defective or non-compliant components be reported to the NRC. This information is shared with industry, and is made publicly available. I must tell you that some counterfeit parts have been found in the U.S. This has renewed our commitment to being vigilant.

In Vienna, I suggested that this kind of information should be collected by all regulators and shared across national borders. Today, I would like to advance this one step further. I would urge every nation that operates commercial nuclear reactors or materials facilities to dedicate the resources necessary to maintain significant safety-related information in appropriate databases; and ensure that this information is up-to-date, reliable, and accessible.

Looking around the world today we see that some information about vendor issues is collected by, and shared among, some regulators. And some information about operating experience is collected by, and shared among, some utilities. But there is little consistency from one country to another on the question of how important this is, or how to do it.

The INSAG Report on Enhancing Operational Experience Feedback that I mentioned earlier makes a compelling case for improving data collection on precursor events. And I certainly endorse the excellent recommendations in that report. But I would urge a broader and deeper approach. Each nation, within its own regulatory framework, should have a well-developed method for capturing a broad spectrum of safety-related data—including information about faulty or counterfeit components discovered through vendor inspections. And when this information is adequately captured and stored, there must also be a method to have it disseminated to the appropriate stakeholders, both domestically and internationally. In my view, devoting the necessary resources to this effort should be a priority for all nuclear regulators.

Through the Multinational Design Evaluation Program, many of us are working toward harmonizing codes and standards for current reactor designs—while recognizing that every nation retains its own particular regulatory authority and practices. What I am suggesting today is less ambitious, but perhaps as important. I do not think we need to create a new international database of safety-related data for the current operating reactors. I am merely urging that every nuclear nation collect this information into databases that are reliable, complete, current, and appropriately accessible to your stakeholders.

Of course, new reactors present an opportunity to create a much more organized, and technologically advanced, international database. And, in fact, the United States is leading an effort to build a new Construction Experience Database that would address Gen III-plus reactors, and include a wide variety of searchable and integrated data to enhance the safety of new reactor construction. The Working Group on Regulation of New Reactors, which is developing this project, just held its second meeting in Paris a few weeks ago.

But as I am constantly telling my staff: the novelty and excitement of potential new reactors cannot distract us from the operating fleet. That is our ongoing and primary responsibility. If we lose focus on that, and a significant nuclear incident occurs somewhere in the world, there might not be as many new reactors. We must always maintain high standards for the current fleet.

In fact, I would even suggest that an operating reactor database is an appropriate element to include as an Annex to the Joint Convention on Nuclear Safety. Since the Convention asks signatories to apply international benchmarks to “maintain a high level of nuclear safety” it appears reasonable to include a benchmark on how safety databases are maintained as part of the Country Reports.

Ladies and gentlemen, a modern nuclear power plant requires hundreds of tons of steel and concrete, miles of piping and wiring, and thousands of nuts and bolts. And yet the single most important element in the safety of that plant may be something each of us could hold in the palm of our hands: current and reliable information. So let me conclude by summarizing my suggestion and my request regarding safety concerns: “If you find it, share it!” This dedication to transparency and information-sharing, and to continuously improving communication and cooperation among all nuclear regulators, will allow us to advance the goals we all share for safe and secure nuclear energy.

As always, I appreciate this opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with you, my fellow regulators, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts and comments.

Thank you.