



NRC NEWS

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“Keeping the Focus on Safety”

Prepared Remarks for

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

**American Nuclear Society
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**Omni Shoreham Hotel
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Good morning everyone, and thank you for that introduction. And thanks to all of you for the opportunity to speak with you today at your winter meeting. It is an honor and a privilege to be Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. I have enjoyed supporting our excellent NRC staff and reaching out to a diverse group of stakeholders, including many of you who are here today.

The theme of your meeting this week, “Nuclear Power: Crafting Energy Solutions,” is certainly a timely topic. While the NRC and the ANS may have different purposes and visions, when it comes to our missions, I believe that they take us to the same ultimate goal. Your mission is to promote the awareness and understanding of the application of nuclear science and technology. We at the NRC are charged with ensuring the safety and security of nuclear power plants and nuclear materials, and protecting the environment. I believe that through your efforts, you also promote safety, security and protection of the environment.

Today I will briefly address two topics: applications to build new reactors and existing reactors.

The Commission has made dramatic changes to the regulations to make the application review process a more straightforward and predictable effort. But as you know, I have not been shy about pointing out that no applicants are following the Part 52 licensing process as it was envisioned. I do not say that to criticize anyone’s approach but rather to explain the facts. This is a complicated endeavor and there is no requirement to follow Part 52 as it was envisioned.

The point is, though, that there is less predictability in the review process because we are doing the environmental reviews, the design reviews and the COL reviews simultaneously rather than in sequence. To provide more predictability, we need to make decisions on design review based on high quality submittals. That means getting the designs completed, using proven codes and standards, and providing sufficient level of detail in submittals, testing and analyses. If we get to the construction phase, that means not only quality craftsmanship and components, but a rigorous inspection and testing program.

When applicants have completed designs and our questions have been thoroughly answered, it will be our responsibility to conduct and to complete our safety reviews in an efficient and effective manner.

The NRC is now reviewing three design certification applications, two design certification amendments, and 13 of the 18 combined license applications that have been docketed. The NRC is prepared for this work. We have a good new reactor licensing process and an expert, dedicated staff that knows how to review license applications.

You don't have to look any further than the existing licensing processes to see that the agency knows how to conduct efficient and predictable licensing reviews. Since 1977, the NRC has completed the review of 127 power uprate applications, and currently has nine power uprate applications under review. Since 2000, the NRC has completed the review of 30 license renewal applications, and currently has 13 license renewal applications under review. Since 2007, the NRC has completed review of four early site permit applications. The agency has completed four design certification reviews since 1997. We have repeatedly shown that we can complete licensing reviews in an efficient manner, while always focusing on protecting public health, safety and security, and protecting the environment.

But one of the biggest challenges to meeting our performance metrics is lack of responsiveness in providing information. In the past, this lack of responsiveness has taken two forms: (1) poor quality responses to staff questions that require re-asking questions, and (2) late responses to staff questions. Another challenge is presented, of course, when licensees or applicants make significant modifications to their application that are unrelated to questions being asked by the staff.

Other challenges to meeting our established timeliness metric are emergent generic concerns (e.g., steam dryers), emergent plant-specific concerns (e.g., use of containment over pressure), or a brief unavailability of review personnel.

So if there are three things I ask of applicants and vendors on the topic of new reactors, it is to: (1) give us high quality and complete applications, (2) provide sufficient and timely responses to staff questions, and (3) follow the process we have established to review them.

It has now been more than 34 years since the fire at Browns Ferry, more than 30 years since the accident at Three Mile Island, and more than 7 years since the vessel head degradation at Davis Besse. Each of these events raised questions about licensees' dedication to safety and about the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's oversight. These events spurred changes that resulted in significant improvements in safety at nuclear reactors.

We developed a stronger regulatory regime in many areas, including updating fitness for duty rules and codifying security enhancements. Together we fully implemented a new reactor oversight process, developed through industry initiative and with significant stakeholder input, which has provided more transparency to the public about operational performance at plants.

The end result of all of these efforts has been that the number of significant events in the United States has declined, and, based on the performance data, plants are operating safely.

But I believe there are reasons for some caution and concern. For the first time in many years, most, if not all, of the pressures industry faces when it comes to the maintenance of existing reactors are due to challenges of complacency, distraction, and economics.

There is a quote that I like, in the novel *Hocus Pocus* by Kurt Vonnegut: “Another flaw in the human character is that everybody wants to build and nobody wants to do maintenance.”

Gone for now – at least in the short term – are the days of burgeoning utility revenues which made it relatively easy to reinvest the profits from nuclear plants back into nuclear infrastructure. Gone too, is the single-minded focus on the existing nuclear plants, as more and more utilities expend resources on the effort to build new ones. And gone also, is the initial challenge of striving to meet the standards of a novel reactor oversight process and a new force-on-force inspection regime.

All of these pressures – a weakened economy and a recent decrease in load demand, the development of new reactors applications and potential new construction, and some complacency about a ten-year-old reactor oversight process – pose a real and tangible risk, threatening to divert attention from safety and security goals. They can lead to distraction and complacency.

I can assure you that the NRC will work diligently to make sure this does not happen. And we will remain focused on efforts to resolve longstanding generic safety issues such as those associated with fire protection and emergency core cooling systems.

Resolving these long-standing issues at existing plants is an important part of our responsibility as a regulator, and it is an important obligation for our licensees.

Recently, we have continued our efforts to ensure existing plants have sufficient decommissioning funds, even in the economic downturn, and that issues associated with aging degradation of buried and inaccessible piping are better understood.

The NRC will continue to remain vigilant in all of these areas to ensure public health and safety, security, and the protection of the environment. And we will continue to make sure we achieve our mission in the most efficient manner possible. I am a firm believer in good government and I fully expect the NRC to be an effective and decisive regulator.

Thanks for the opportunity to talk with you about two key issues – the safety of the existing fleet and the challenges that new reactors pose. I look forward to continuing to work with you in the years ahead.