



# NRC NEWS

**U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**

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## **“Opportunities and Challenges for Regulators”**

**Commissioner William C. Ostendorff**

**United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission**

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**42nd Annual National Conference on Radiation Control**

**Newport, Rhode Island**

### **Introduction**

Good morning CRCPD (Conference of Radiation Control Program Directors) members and board. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you for inviting me to speak this morning. Today marks my third week as an NRC Commissioner. Though I do not have a deep background in the issues before you, I wanted to come today and begin my education to provide a foundation for my service as Commissioner. My experience with nuclear technology is primarily in the defense arena. I recall conducting inventories of sealed radioactive sources in 1978 when serving as Main Propulsion and Chemistry and Radiologicals Assistant on the USS GEORGE BANCROFT, the first of six submarines on which I served. I have also been around radioactive sources used for radiography of nuclear piping welds in various naval shipyards. So, while not a complete stranger to the issues before the National Conference on Radiation Control, I will have much to learn about the issues associated with the commercial use of radiation and nuclear technologies- and I am eager to do so. The high quality staff at the NRC has been an invaluable resource in bringing me up to speed, and I am also looking forward to learning from other NRC stakeholders, such as the CRCPD, regarding the issues and challenges both of today and for the future.

As I begin my journey of working with my fellow Commissioners in addressing NRC policy issues, I would like to let you all know that I am a firm believer in predictable and stable regulation. Predictability and stability that facilitates long-term strategic planning is essential for all of the NRC’s stakeholders, including the regulated community. Furthermore, I also believe that it is critical that the NRC conducts its business openly, with transparency and with clear and effective communications.

## **Opportunities and Challenges in Radiation Protection**

While I am new to many of the issues before the CRCPD, I do feel that my experience with radioactive materials during my career in the nuclear Navy and time as Principal Deputy Administrator at the National Nuclear Security Administration provides a helpful context for addressing the challenges of new technology in a dynamically changing environment. I applaud the key initiatives that the CRCPD has undertaken, such as the need for a consistent framework for medical reporting and collaboration with the NRC and other federal agencies on implementation of new security measures. I certainly have learned in my three weeks at the NRC that the number and types of radioactive materials licensees is far reaching. When I consider that the NRC and the agreement states regulate about 22,000 licensees for the use of radioactive materials, and that this represents only a portion of the issues considered at this conference, it is clear that the scope and magnitude of challenges and opportunities for radiation protection is also far reaching.

Yesterday, I visited the Rhode Island Blood Center and the Rhode Island Nuclear Science Center. I very much appreciated the efforts of the state of Rhode Island for facilitating these informative visits. Seeing the activities that take place at such facilities emphasized to me that the issues you discussed at this conference have a direct and daily impact on people's lives. You are on the front line of protecting people and the environment, and that job is an important one.

## **The Value of Cooperation and Sharing of Experiences**

I find it reassuring to know that there are organizations such as the CRCPD that help facilitate cooperation and experience sharing on the key issues of radiation protection. Your combined knowledge and experience in safety and security is important not only for today but also for tomorrow. I think the CRPD's efforts to develop a machine source medical events reporting system that would establish a consistent reporting structure across the medical community for these devices is a good example that will promote efficiency, consistency, and quality in the reporting of such events. I think effective cooperation, both domestic and international, will become increasingly important as wider and more sophisticated applications of radiation and nuclear technologies are introduced throughout the world. In this regard, when gaps are identified between the development of new technology and the formulation of policy to guide implementation, effective coordination and communication among radiation protection programs to help fill in these gaps is vital.

Let me now address three specific points in a bit more detail.

## **International Cooperation**

First, is the area of international cooperation. I noticed that there are several presentations on the conference agenda related to international issues. As radiation technology advances, it will become more and more critical to stay connected with international developments in the area of radiation protection. The NRC, for example, is actively engaging stakeholders regarding the degree to which the standards of ICRP 103 should be integrated into NRC regulations in the context of the Commission's position that its current radiation protection regulations provide

adequate protection. Given that any change in regulation will impact state requirements, it will be important for the states and your licensees to weigh in during this process and stay connected with international developments to ensure that all perspectives are considered. I thank the states for providing comments on IAEA's basic safety standards, which as you know, have been a significant effort that has resulted in further progress in this area.

### **The Need for Good Communication**

The second area is the need for good communication. Open and transparent communication with the public is and will be an increasingly important part of our jobs as technology advances. History reflects countless examples where policy formulation lags the introduction of new technologies – the area of radiation technology is no exception. Radiation technology cannot fully grow in an environment where the practices are not accepted by the communities where the technologies are used. As regulators and scientists, we sometimes forget that part of our job is translating our knowledge of technology and risk to others who may have to live with the technology on a daily basis. I encourage the CRCPD to continue its efforts in this area.

### **Development of Human Capacity**

The third point is on the development of human capacity. Another challenge that we all face is ensuring we have cultivated the proper skill sets to safely, securely and reliably regulate and use radiation and nuclear technologies. Whether you are a baby boomer or a generation "X"er, "Y"er, or "Z"er, knowledge management, or capturing and sharing knowledge, will become more and more critical both within state programs and between them. Today the average age of the nation's nuclear worker is about 50. Within five years, about 35 percent of the specialists who have been running U.S. nuclear plants for the past quarter-century are expected to begin a mass retirement. Such statistics point to the need for structured succession planning and the smooth transfer of knowledge to ensure continued success. I would encourage you to work closely together to share training and staffing resources in support of a nationwide radiation protection program.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Let me start wrapping up my remarks by first noting that change is inevitable. We as regulators and users of radiation and nuclear technologies need to adapt, initiate, and embrace change that is necessary to move us forward. World events and events within our industries, whether the September 11 attacks or the closure of the Barnwell disposal site to out-of-compact states, drive the need for the changes that have been made. Such changes will be considered in the nuclear industry in areas such as security, safety culture, and low level waste storage and disposal. While such changes are necessary, forums such as the CRCPD ensure that all aspects of such issues are thoughtfully considered before change is implemented. I encourage you to be proactive in commenting in the various NRC processes so that the Commission understands all perspectives before making a final decision.

Lastly, I want to underscore the importance of the relationship between the NRC and the states. Being closer to the use of radiation in your state, in my view, you are often in the best position to understand what works and what doesn't work with regard to radiation safety. These viewpoints are critical for the NRC to make decisions that maximize the protection of public health and safety in a way that properly accounts for the risk and benefits of a particular use. I will strive during my term here to ensure a synergistic relationship between the federal government and the states.

Thank you for your attention and I will be happy to take your questions.