



NRC NEWS

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“The Regulator’s Role in Nuclear Security”

Prepared Remarks

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Chairman

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

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Thank you for the introduction. I appreciate the opportunity to address this important workshop. I am sure some of you are wondering why the head of a regulatory agency primarily known for its domestic responsibilities, its reactor focus, and its safety mission is here today addressing a workshop on nonproliferation. During my remarks today, I hope to answer that question by providing you a sense of how the NRC’s responsibilities and the international activities it has initiated support the safe and secure uses of nuclear technology both here in the United States and abroad.

In recent years, many nations around the world have demonstrated a tremendous interest in developing and expanding peaceful applications of nuclear technology. Secretary Clinton’s leadership in launching the Peaceful Uses Initiative and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Amano’s efforts to focus global attention on cancer treatment in developing countries, underscore this point. Although the development of power reactors often receives much attention, up to the present time, only a small fraction of countries have actually constructed and operated one. As you will discuss in greater detail later this morning, many more countries have developed or would like to develop national programs to take advantage of the medical, industrial, agricultural, and basic research uses of nuclear technology. Those non-power programs span areas as varied as cancer treatment, food irradiation, and even well-logging.

As countries pursue the development of these and other types of peaceful uses programs, it’s important that they have an understanding of the responsibilities associated with deploying nuclear technologies. In making the decision on whether to move forward with these programs, nations should consider both the risks and benefits of doing so, and put measures in place to properly focus attention on key safety and security issues. The development of strong national

regulatory bodies is an essential step in this process. To support those efforts, the NRC has undertaken a number of initiatives, both bilaterally and with the IAEA, to provide assistance to other countries in developing the necessary regulatory infrastructure to ensure that they can utilize nuclear technology safely and securely. As the world's largest nuclear regulatory authority, the NRC's tremendous experience places it in a strong position to take a leadership role in extending this type of assistance.

The safeguarding of dual use technologies and the nuclear materials used by reactors and fuel cycle facilities have long been at the forefront of the NRC's mission. Our responsibilities begin with our statutory mandate as the U.S. Government's import and export licensing authority. As the agency charged with licensing imports and exports of nuclear material, the NRC has established processes that help ensure materials and equipment are transferred safely, securely, and in keeping with U.S. nonproliferation policies.

It's safe to say, however, that over the past decade, the NRC and its regulatory counterparts around the world have developed a better appreciation of the security concerns posed by the radioactive sources typically employed by radiation medicine and other non-power applications of nuclear technology. The sheer number of radioactive sources – thousands in the United States alone – creates challenges in securing these sources, as does the fact that the sources are widely dispersed geographically and used for a broad range of purposes. The smaller staffs and limited resources of the organizations that typically handle these sources – as compared to the large utilities that operate nuclear power plants – also create challenges. These are precisely the types of issues that countries need to consider and address as they decide whether to develop or expand their peaceful uses programs.

Those countries that move forward with national nuclear technology programs can – and should – take advantage of the extensive experience of the United States and other nations. As peaceful uses programs have evolved over the past few decades, it has become increasingly clear that safety and security principles have global application. Recognizing this, the NRC has worked throughout its history with other established nuclear regulatory authorities to promote the exchange of good practices and lessons learned. Through our technical exchange agreements with nearly 40 countries, our agency is able to work closely with our international partners on safety, safeguards, material accounting and control, physical protection, radiation protection, spent fuel and waste management, and a number of other areas. The NRC has gained valuable information and assistance from these cooperative efforts, and I have heard from my regulatory counterparts that they have as well.

Drawing on decades of licensing and oversight experience, the NRC also has provided assistance on radioactive source safety and security issues to a variety of countries. The program's initial focus was largely on the countries of the former Soviet Union but, since the early 1990s, has expanded to other areas including Africa and Latin America. The NRC also has worked to implement the Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources and worked closely with the IAEA in its efforts to assist Member States in developing strong and effective licensing programs.

Additionally, we have expanded our assistance efforts in recent years to include a broader approach to regulatory infrastructure development. With emphasis on the importance of a strong, independent regulatory body as an essential prerequisite for any new program, the NRC has engaged in bilateral assistance activities, encouraged regional cooperation, and worked closely with the IAEA to reach a wide audience. As the number of countries exploring peaceful uses programs has grown in recent years, this type of nuclear safety and security cooperation has never been more important.

This is just a small sampling of the NRC's international initiatives to support the safe and secure uses of nuclear technology worldwide. While I can assure you that the NRC has benefited from these exchanges, and that I believe other nations have as well, it's important to recognize that their effectiveness ultimately depends on each individual nation's commitment to nuclear safety and security. To that end, we will continue to work closely, both with our international counterparts and with other U.S. Government agencies, to convey this important message and promote access to information and resources to help achieve these objectives.