



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

E-mail: opa_resource@nrc.gov Site: www.nrc.gov

Blog: <http://public-blog.nrc-gateway.gov>

No. S-11-011

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko
Side Event on Fukushima Daiichi Accident
5th Review Meeting of the Convention on Nuclear Safety
April 4, 2011
Vienna, Austria

I would like to reiterate my condolences to all those who have been affected by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Our hearts go out to all who have been dealing with the aftermath of these natural disasters, and we are mindful of the long and difficult road they will face in recovering. We know that the people of Japan are resilient and strong, and we have every confidence that they will come through this terrible time and move forward, with resolve, to rebuild their vibrant country.

I made a brief visit to Japan last week. I wanted to convey a message of support and cooperation to our Japanese counterparts there and to assess the ongoing situation. I also met with senior Japanese government and TEPCO officials, and consulted with a team of experts from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission who went to Japan as part of our assistance effort.

NRC Response to Japan Events

I'd like to take a few minutes to address the response of the NRC to the tragic events in Japan, and then to briefly describe how we plan to proceed.

On Friday, March 11, when the earthquake and tsunami struck, the NRC's headquarters Operations Center began operating on a 24-hour basis to monitor and analyze events at nuclear power plants in Japan. At the request of the Japanese government, and through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the NRC sent a team of its technical experts to provide on-the-ground support, and we have been in continual contact with them since that time. And, within the United States, the NRC has been working closely with other Federal agencies as part of our government's response to the situation.

Shortly after 4:00 AM (Washington, DC time) on Friday, March 11th, the NRC Emergency Operations Center made the first telephone call to inform NRC management of the earthquake and the potential impact on U.S. plants. We went into monitoring mode at our

Emergency Operations Center, and the NRC's initial focus was on the possible impacts of the tsunami on U.S. plants and radioactive materials on the West Coast, and in Hawaii, Alaska, and U.S. Territories in the Pacific.

We were in communication with our licensees and our resident inspectors at Diablo Canyon Power Plant and San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station in California, and the Radiation Control Program Directors for California, Washington, Oregon and Hawaii.

On that same day, we began interactions with our Japanese regulatory counterparts and dispatched two experts to Japan to help at the embassy in Tokyo.

By Monday, March 14, we had dispatched a total of 11 NRC staff to Japan. We have subsequently rotated in additional staff to continue on-the-ground assistance in Japan. The areas of focus for this team are: 1) to assist the Japanese government and respond to requests from our Japanese regulatory counterparts; 2) to support the U.S. Ambassador and the U.S. government assistance effort.

On Wednesday, March 16, we collaborated with other U.S. government agencies and decided to advise American citizens to evacuate within a 50-mile range around the plant. We believed this decision was a prudent course of action, and would be consistent with what we would do in a similar situation in the United States. This evacuation range was predicated on the information that we had available at the time, which indicated the possibility that reactor cores and spent fuel pools may have been compromised.

We have been working with an extensive range of stakeholders regarding the Japan situation, including the White House, Congressional staff, our state regulatory counterparts, a number of other federal agencies, and the international regulatory bodies around the world.

Steps Already Taken

The NRC's program of continuous improvement in the future will include lessons learned from the events in Japan. We already have begun enhancing inspection activities through temporary instructions to our inspection staff, including the resident inspectors and the inspectors in our four Regional offices.

We've also issued an information notice to licensees to make them aware of activities they should undertake to verify that their capabilities to mitigate conditions due to severe accidents—including the loss of significant operational and safety systems—are in effect and operational. Specific conditions include a total loss of electric power, flooding, and damage from seismic events.

On their own initiative, the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO) issued a Level I Event Report (highest level) to its members on March 15, identifying four actions requiring written responses. Those include walkdowns and verifications of capabilities to address large fires and explosions; severe accident management guidelines; mitigation of station blackout conditions; internal and external flooding, and fire and flooding events that could be impacted by a concurrent seismic event.

NRC Plans Moving Forward

While we are confident about the safety of U.S. nuclear power plants, our regulatory agency has a responsibility to the American people to undertake a systematic and methodical review of the safety of our domestic facilities, in light of the natural disaster and the resulting nuclear situation in Japan. Examining all available information is an essential part of that effort.

On March 21, my fellow Commissioners and I established a senior level task force to conduct a comprehensive review of our processes and regulations to determine whether the agency should make improvements to our regulatory system.

This review will be conducted in a short-term and a longer-term timeframe. The short-term review has already begun, and will identify potential or preliminary near-term operational or regulatory issues. A longer-term review will begin as soon as we have sufficient information from Japan. That review will be completed in six months from the beginning of the evaluation. The task force's reports will be publicly available.

The task force will evaluate all technical and policy issues related to the event to identify additional potential research, generic issues, changes to the reactor oversight process, rulemakings, and adjustments to the regulatory framework that should be pursued by the NRC. We also expect to evaluate issues that may involve multiple U.S. Government agencies, such as emergency preparedness. We will seek input from all key stakeholders during this process. Based on what we learn in our review, we will take all of the appropriate actions that are necessary to ensure the continuing safety of the American people.

We will also continue to communicate closely with our regulatory counterparts throughout this process. As we navigate lessons-learned efforts in the months ahead, international cooperation takes on new importance. The IAEA has a significant role to play in facilitating information-sharing among countries as we undertake this process. To that end, we commend Director General Amano's announcement of the Agency's intention to host a ministerial-level conference in June. We are also pleased to support the IAEA as it works to address and incorporate the events at Fukushima into its activities in various technical disciplines, as well as continuing its work in areas that have already been identified as nuclear safety and security priorities.

Over the next few days, contracting parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety will have the opportunity to present information on their nuclear safety programs and receive feedback from their counterparts. This review process provides us with an important venue to address the events in Japan and begin to formulate plans for short- and long-term cooperation. But in addition, it continues to serve a critical purpose in generally advancing nuclear safety worldwide. We are pleased to be part of this process.

We commend the IAEA staff for its hard work in preparing for the Convention review meeting and continuing to facilitate the provision of assistance to the Japanese people. I appreciate the opportunity to address you this evening.