



NRC NEWS

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**Fukushima and U.S. Nuclear Safety
Prepared Remarks for
The Honorable Gregory B. Jaczko
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
at
National Press Club
Washington, D.C.
July 18, 2011**

Thank you for that kind introduction. I am pleased and honored to be here today, speaking at this venerable institution. The National Press Club is a venue like no other. It has been at the center of Washington journalism and news for more than 100 years.

I especially appreciate the Club's historic emblem of the owl. To the Press Club, the owl symbolizes wisdom, awareness, and long nights spent on the job. I won't claim wisdom, and I'll let you judge my sense of awareness. But, I can absolutely guarantee that I have spent a number of sleepless nights on the job!

As Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, one of the best aspects of my job is having the opportunity to lead a staff of nearly 4,000 talented, dedicated public servants. Like any regulatory agency, we hear from all sides and all perspectives about both our own safety record and that of the industry we regulate. We know we can always do better, and we always strive to do better. But I have absolute confidence – and the American people should as well – in the experience, expertise, and professionalism of the NRC staff. Today, I've brought three excellent representatives of our team with me, and I'd like to introduce them to you.

Michelle Catts has a degree in nuclear engineering and has worked for the NRC for eight years. She currently serves as one of two senior resident NRC inspectors at the Indian Point nuclear power plant in New York. As a resident inspector, she is the eyes and ears of the NRC. Ms. Catts and her fellow resident inspectors are the front-line staff who conducted the inspections ordered by the agency in the days following the nuclear accident in Japan.

Dan Frumkin is originally from the D.C. area and has a degree in fire protection engineering from Maryland. After working on fire protection programs for two nuclear plants, he has worked on improving fire protection at nuclear plants all across the country for the past 11 years at the NRC. This is a very important and long-standing issue for nuclear safety, and Mr. Frumkin has been a big part of the NRC efforts to make progress on this issue.

Jennifer Uhle has been with the agency for 18 years. She has a doctorate in nuclear engineering from MIT, and in fact, the NRC helped provide her the opportunity to pursue those studies. Right now, she helps make decisions on where the NRC spends its research money to best advance the science of nuclear safety. Most recently, Ms. Uhle was part of our 24-7 Operations Center team during the Japan crisis and, because of her expertise, she was asked to serve on the International Atomic Energy Agency's fact-finding mission to Japan.

These three outstanding professionals are representatives of the thousands of individuals who work day in and day out to make sure we meet our responsibilities to the public.

I am sure the recent events in Japan and their implications for how we approach nuclear safety in this country are foremost on everyone's mind. Since the events began to unfold four months ago, the NRC has taken strong and immediate actions to ensure the continued safety of the nation's nuclear power plants. In light of the events in Japan, the Commission has undertaken a systematic and methodical review of the NRC's nuclear safety program. This review, which has both short- and long-term components, has moved forward with a strong sense of urgency, given the significant safety issues under examination.

To spearhead this effort, the Commission established a Task Force, made up of some of the agency's most experienced and expert staff. The members of the Task Force represent 135 years of regulatory experience. Throughout its review, the Task Force had full access to the NRC headquarters and regional staff and the NRC site team in Japan. As part of its review, the Task Force also reached out to the Federal Emergency Management Agency to benefit from their expertise in emergency management, as well as the Institute for Nuclear Power Operations in order to understand the industry's response to the events in Japan. Additionally, the Task Force considered information received from stakeholders and monitored international efforts and reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Nuclear Energy Agency, and other organizations.

Last week, the Task Force completed its 90-day review and submitted its report and recommendations to the Commission for its consideration. In line with the NRC's commitment to openness and transparency, the Commission has made the full report publicly available. The Task Force will also formally present the Report to the Commission at a public meeting tomorrow morning. I want to thank the members of the Task Force for their tremendous work. It's clear that their focus remained first and foremost on nuclear safety. In particular, I want to acknowledge Charlie Miller who delayed his retirement in order to lead this effort. Charlie still has hopes of retiring sometime soon, but we're doing our best to talk him out of it.

The Task Force developed a comprehensive set of 12 recommendations—many with both short- and long- term elements—needed to strengthen nuclear safety. In its review, the Task

Force did not find any imminent risk to public health and safety from the continued operation of the nation's nuclear power plants. The Task Force was clear, however, that any accident involving core damage and uncontrolled radioactive releases of the magnitude of Fukushima – even one without significant health consequences – is inherently unacceptable.

This is the same reaction I have seen as I have attended meetings throughout the country and throughout the world. Quite simply, many of us who work in this field thought this type of accident could not and would not happen again. So the challenge for the Congress, the industry, the public and of course the agency is how to better ensure an accident like the one in Japan will not happen in the United States. But like a doctor's Hippocratic Oath, we must ensure we do that in a way that does no greater harm to nuclear safety.

I am tremendously proud of the work of the Task Force. They have given us an excellent starting point to address this very question. Over the next 90 days, the Commission now needs to do its job – systematically and methodically reviewing these recommendations in a public and transparent way, hearing from all relevant stakeholders. Regardless of your view of the Task Force's work, this next step is something on which we can all agree.

This is by no means the first time we have contemplated significant changes to our approach to nuclear safety. Throughout the NRC's history, our approach to nuclear safety and security has necessarily evolved as new scientific information and operational experience have given us a better understanding of nuclear technology and its risks. Although this process has primarily unfolded incrementally through piecemeal and patchwork changes along the way, the history of nuclear power has also been punctuated by several significant events that challenged old truths and upended our understanding of nuclear safety and security. The 1975 Brown's Ferry Fire, the 1979 Three Mile Island accident, and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were all such watershed events. These events led to dramatic changes in both how the NRC regulates and how the nuclear industry operates – changes that remain with us to this day. Based on the Task Force's analysis and recommendations, it is clear that the accident at the Fukushima Dai-ichi site is another such event.

In laying out a Regulatory Framework for the 21st Century, the Commission's Task Force has charted a path forward on how we can fundamentally strengthen the NRC's nuclear safety program. The Task Force's recommendations are too extensive for me to fully discuss today. They range in areas from loss of power to earthquakes, flooding, spent fuel pools, venting, and emergency preparedness. They include proposed new requirements for nuclear power plants to reevaluate and upgrade their seismic and flooding protection, to strengthen their ability to deal with the prolonged loss of power, and to develop emergency plans that specifically contemplate the possibility of events involving multiple reactors. Throughout the report, the Task Force emphasizes that effective NRC action is essential in addressing these challenges and that voluntary industry initiatives are no substitute for strong and effective NRC oversight.

In addition to specific recommendations, the Task Force calls on the Commission to redefine "adequate protection" in light of what we have learned from Fukushima. Now for those of you not steeped in NRC parlance, "adequate protection" is likely not a familiar term. As our statutory mandate for safety, it is the touchstone of what we do as regulators. It is the standard of

safety that the NRC must require of nuclear power plants and other licensees in order to allow them to operate. Over the past 25 years, there have been few occasions when the Commission has deemed it necessary to revisit this standard and redefine how safe is safe enough. We did so after September 11th, and now, the Task Force believes we should do so again, given the insights that the Fukushima accident has provided about rare, catastrophic events. While the decision of whether we redefine this core definition of safety is one for the Commission to make by examining the Task Force's recommendations, it's clear that Fukushima was an unacceptable accident and that we need to take strong steps to ensure that type of accident does not happen in the United States.

As we consider and respond to these recommendations, the Commission is committed to involving the public and our stakeholders in this process. At the NRC, we never forget that nuclear regulation is the public's business and that we have the responsibility to conduct our work openly and transparently. Since my very first speech after joining the Commission almost seven years ago, I have emphasized that openness and transparency are indispensable ingredients for effective decision making.

In order to move forward openly and transparently, I have proposed to my Commission colleagues a roadmap for taking action on the report. The centerpiece of this proposal is a series of public Commission meetings with the NRC staff and stakeholders. In the lead-up to these meetings, there would be opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback on the Task Force's recommendations and for the NRC staff to provide additional information to the Commission. I believe this approach will help ensure that the Commission benefits from the information and perspectives that our stakeholders bring to the table.

We are in a strong position today to be able to move forward quickly and effectively because of the Task Force's outstanding work. The American public should be grateful and proud of the service that the Task Force members have provided. The Task Force has clearly done its part in helping us to better understand what nuclear safety requires in a post-Fukushima world. Now, it is time for my Commission colleagues and me to do our part. We have the responsibility to the American people to diligently and expeditiously review these recommendations, and make the best decisions to ensure the continued safety of the public.

In light of the Task Force's work, I see no reason why the Commission cannot provide clear direction on each of their recommendations in less than 90 days. That is the time the Commission gave the Task Force to do its job, and I believe that is more than enough time for the Commission to outline a clear path forward. That does not mean that the agency will be able to take final action on all these matters, since certain recommendations require rules that may take months or years to develop. I believe we have enough information at this time, however, to take the necessary interim steps on issues identified by the Task Force and initiate longer-term rulemakings that will allow for full and meaningful participation by the public.

In order to provide that clear direction within the next 90 days, the Commission may need to do things differently than it normally does. That should not be unexpected, since these are not normal times for the NRC or for our licensees. We all know that some changes are in order, and none of us want to make rushed, poor decisions. We must move forward, however, with the

urgency called for by these safety issues. As Chairman, I am committed to ensuring that the Commission has all the information it needs to make timely decisions and take decisive actions in response to the Task Force's recommendations.

As I alluded to earlier in my remarks, this is by no means the first time we have undertaken a significant reevaluation of what nuclear safety and security requires. Nearly a decade ago, we embarked on an effort to overhaul and strengthen the security of the nation's nuclear plants in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. While we moved forward with short-term changes, it has taken the NRC and the industry almost 10 years to fully develop and implement that new framework. I believe that it would be unacceptable for our current effort to take that long.

That is why I am calling today for the NRC and the nuclear industry to commit to complete and implement the process of learning and applying the lessons of the Fukushima accident within five years – by 2016. This will take a lot of hard work, strong and decisive leadership from the Commission, and an even stronger commitment by our licensees to put safety first. We have no other choice. The costs of inaction are simply too high.

The Task Force has provided an excellent start to this effort. I believe that we are more than up to the task of seeing this effort through. This is not an NRC problem or a nuclear industry problem. This is an imperative for nuclear safety. The American people are looking to everyone involved in nuclear safety – from the operators to the regulators – to do their part in continuing to protect the public. We must deliver. Thank you.