

## U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE (MD)

MD 5.5		PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAM		DT-13-08	
Volume 5		Governmental Relations and Public Affairs			
Approved By:		Allison M. Macfarlane Chairman			
Date Approved:		April 26, 2013			
Expiration Date:		April 26, 2018			
Issuing Office:		Office of Public Affairs			
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY					
Directive and Handbook 5.5 are being revised to include the NRC's policy on the use of social media.					

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## **I. POLICY**

- A.** It is the policy of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to conduct its business publicly and candidly and keep the public apprised of regulatory actions in order to maintain the public's confidence. The NRC recognizes that the public has a right to know what the agency is doing to protect public health and safety and why.
- B.** It is also the policy of the NRC that should a video news release be developed by the agency, it is clearly identified as an NRC product and is reviewed and approved by the Office of Public Affairs (OPA), in consultation with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), before it is issued.
- C.** When NRC staff use agency assets to engage in social media activities, they are required to understand and comply with the NRC's expectations for conducting these interactions.
- D.** The NRC complies with the Plain Writing Act of 2010, P.L. 111-274, which directs Federal agencies to adopt clear communication that the public can understand and use. (See the Plain Writing at the NRC Web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/open/plain-writing.html>.)

## **II. OBJECTIVES**

- Make available to the public through the news media, the Internet, social media, and other channels of communication complete and accurate information on the NRC activities to ensure appropriate openness and assist the public and stakeholders in understanding agency activities.
- Keep NRC management advised of public interest in proposed policies, programs, and projects so that public affairs actions may be developed and executed effectively, and to inform NRC decisionmaking.
- Ensure that the NRC does not develop video news releases to be used to influence pending legislation, promote product sales, or promote the status of various industries and to clearly identify the NRC in the text or audio as the originator of all video news releases prepared by or in cooperation with the NRC.

## **III. ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND DELEGATIONS OF AUTHORITY**

### **A. Chairman**

As NRC's official spokesperson, makes the final decision on news releases in any form, when necessary, consistent with the Commission's decision and policy.

**B. Executive Director for Operations (EDO)**

1. Reviews and concurs in draft news releases, including those associated with staff papers (i.e., Office of the Secretary of the Commission (SECY) papers). Forwards papers to SECY for distribution to the Commission and notifies OPA of any changes to news releases. Provides comments/changes to OPA on all draft news releases before OPA forwards them to the Chairman's office.
2. Informs OPA of any significant staff action that may merit a news release.

**C. General Counsel (GC)**

1. Provides legal advice and a determination for any proposed NRC video releases. The legal advice and determination are conducted in compliance with the applicable provisions of Public Law 109-13, "Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief, 2005."
2. Provides legal advice to staff and OPA on draft news releases, when appropriate.

**D. Director, Office of Public Affairs (OPA)**

1. Develops and administers agencywide policies and programs for disseminating information to the public and the news media concerning NRC policies, programs, and activities; informs senior NRC management of media coverage of interest to the agency.
2. Provides to the Chairman, the Commission, the EDO, and senior management—
  - (a) Early advice on public affairs strategies to deal effectively with the public on issues of interest; and
  - (b) Information on external activities that may affect NRC interests.
3. Recommends to the Chairman, the Commission, and the EDO requirements for public statements, including their substance, timing, and method of delivery, except those statements prepared and delivered as part of the legislative process.
4. Provides advice and assistance to other Government agencies concerning the preparation and dissemination of public information relating to or affecting NRC programs or policies.
5. Assists in identifying speakers, furnishes publications, and renders other assistance in response to requests from the public and conducts workshops and seminars for members of the media and educational institutions.
6. Arranges interviews of the Chairman, the Commissioners, the EDO, and other key managers and technical experts with reporters, as needed.

7. Reviews, and is consulted on, any decision by offices and divisions to deny a request from the news media for information.
8. Issues all NRC news releases and posts them to NRC's external Web site on the internet; maintains NRC news releases, speeches, and other NRC documents of public and media interest on NRC's external Web site; and maintains NRC's official presence on social media sites. Manages the NRC's external blog, and coordinates the content of NRC's external Web site home page with the Office of the Executive Director for Operations and the Office of Information Services.
9. Reviews and approves, in consultation with OGC, issuance of any video news releases that are developed by the agency to ensure clear identification in the text or audio that the video is an NRC product.
10. Plans, directs, and coordinates the activities of public affairs officers (PAOs) located at NRC regional offices. (These regional PAOs are employees of OPA.)

#### **E. Directors of Offices and Divisions**

1. Coordinate with the Director of OPA—
  - (a) Proposed news releases, both written and video, and other public information documents and actions;
  - (b) Proposed Commission decision papers (i.e., SECY papers) as necessary for evaluation of the need for news releases or other public affairs actions;
  - (c) News media inquiries for nonroutine information and those that require coordination outside the receiving office or division;
  - (d) Text of proposed public statements (e.g., speeches, magazine articles, radio and television programs, discussion panel material) involving nonroutine NRC program information, new program information, or new policy interpretations; and
  - (e) High-level content of the NRC external Web site (<http://www.nrc.gov>) that will likely be of interest to the public.
2. Advise the Director of OPA of communications between the NRC and other organizations or individuals that are likely to have public information implications, including communications transmitted via social media.
3. Provide prompt information and assistance to the Director of OPA in preparing and releasing statements on accidents and incidents.
4. Determine the appropriate level of office review of draft news releases and other public materials, such as blog posts, for accuracy and completeness of information.

5. Ensure that when NRC employees use agency assets to engage in social media activities, they understand and comply with the NRC's expectations for conducting these interactions.

## IV. DEFINITIONS

### **Nonroutine Information**

Refers in general to all proposed statements, documents, and answers to inquiries except those covering matters of local interest and those limited to material that has been previously released. In essence, the interpretation of nonroutine is a matter of judgment and common sense.

### **Social Media**

Refers to various computer-mediated activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content. Social media includes, but is not limited to, blogs, video sharing, and social networking.

## V. APPLICABILITY

The policy and guidance in this directive and handbook apply to all NRC employees.

## VI. DIRECTIVE HANDBOOK

Handbook 5.5 describes the process for preparing and issuing news releases.

## VII. REFERENCES

### ***Nuclear Regulatory Commission Documents***

"Interim Guidance on the Use of Social Media," dated December 28, 2010 (ML103060402).

"NRC Plain Writing Action Plan," dated July 12, 2011 (<http://www.internal.nrc.gov/NRC/PLAIN/index.html>).

Plain Writing at the NRC (<http://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/open/plain-writing.html>).

### ***United States Code***

"Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief, 2005" (Pub. L. 109-13).

"Plain Writing Act of 2010" (Pub. L. 111-274).

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## **I. PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAM**

### **A. News Releases**

1. News releases are a key means for making available to the public through the news media complete, accurate, clear, and timely information on U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission activities.
2. To communicate information effectively, news releases should be written clearly in plain language. NRC complies with the Plain Writing Act of 2010 (Pub. L. 111-274)

and the NRC Plain Writing Action Plan  
(<http://www.internal.nrc.gov/NRC/PLAIN/index.html>).

3. News releases announce major policy decisions, actions, and speeches by the Commission and senior management, as well as other significant NRC activities of high public interest. These activities include, but are not limited to, rulemakings, licensing hearings, enforcement actions, advisory committee reports and meetings, special inspections, nuclear facility safety assessments, licensing actions, generic communications to licensees, significant public meetings and workshops, and NRC organization and senior management changes.

## **B. Preparation and Issuance of News Releases**

1. A news release should be prepared by the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) before an NRC decision or action becomes final. Offices are expected to notify OPA as early as possible of planned activities that may be of public interest or that could affect public confidence. There are numerous information sources that can trigger the need for a news release, including—
  - (a) Commission decision papers (i.e., Office of the Secretary of the Commission (SECY) papers) and concomitant staff requirements memoranda (SRMs);
  - (b) Correspondence with licensees or Congress;
  - (c) Executive Director for Operations (EDO) Updates;
  - (d) Meeting and *Federal Register* notices;
  - (e) Inspection and NUREG reports;
  - (f) Plant performance evaluations;
  - (g) Commissioner facility visits; and
  - (h) NRC employee announcements.
2. Technical offices review news releases for accuracy. OPA ensures releases are written clearly in plain language and convey information of interest to the public in journalistic style.

## **C. News Releases Involving SECY Papers**

1. SECY papers that provide the Commission with policy, rulemaking, and adjudicatory matters are a major source of information for news releases. When drafting a SECY paper, the originator should contact OPA to determine whether a news release is appropriate. If one is needed, the originator should provide background information for OPA to draft the news release. The originator should review the draft press release for accuracy and completeness and attach a hard copy of it to the SECY

package so that the version that goes with the SECY paper to the EDO is agreed upon by both OPA and the originator. This process is consistent with internal Commission procedures.

2. The originating office determines the appropriate level of office review of a news release. That office also determines whether review of the news release is needed by another office, such as the Office of the General Counsel. If so, the originating office should obtain the additional review and resolve any comments before forwarding a single set of comments to OPA in a timely manner. OPA should receive only one set of comments on the news release from the originating office.
3. Any proposed changes to the news release must be communicated directly to OPA. There should not be multiple sources of changes or comments that OPA has to coordinate. Any revisions to the news release from the staff or the Office of the Executive Director (OEDO) are to be incorporated into the paper by OPA before it is forwarded to SECY.
4. OPA must have on file the same version of the news release that goes forward to the Commission.
5. Once the Commission votes on the recommendations in the SECY paper, an SRM is generated that reflects the Commission's decision. The SRM, the SECY paper, and Commission voting record are made available to the public. In concert with the Commission's decision being made public, OPA issues a final news release after making any changes requested by the Commission or required to reflect the SRM accurately. The originator of the SECY paper should communicate to OPA any changes directed by the Commission that affect the news release.
6. OPA electronically sends the final news release to the Office of Congressional Affairs (OCA) and the Office of Federal and State Materials and Environmental Management Programs (FSME) to allow advance notification to their constituents. A short time later, OPA posts the release to the external Web site (<http://www.nrc.gov>) and distributes it to over 100 news organizations, NRC employees, the Public Document Room, certain trade publications, nuclear industry contacts, and public interest groups and other interested parties through a Listserv.

#### **D. Other Sources for News Releases**

1. New Releases About Significant Agency Actions that are Not Contained in SECY Papers

- (a) Content

OPA drafts news releases about significant agency actions that are not contained in SECY papers. These news releases include the following topics:



- (i) Enforcement actions,
- (ii) Plant performance evaluations,
- (iii) Event inspections, and
- (iv) High-interest public meetings.

(b) Coordination and Approval Required

OPA drafts these news releases and coordinates with the appropriate office. OPA then submits the draft news release to OEDO and the Chairman's office for review.

2. News Releases Dealing With a Specific Licensed Facility

When a news release deals with a specific licensed facility, the following process applies:

- (a) Typically, a public affairs officer in the region drafts the news release.
- (b) OPA and regional management then review and approve the news release.
- (c) OPA sends an advance information copy of the news release to the following organizations:
  - (i) OCA,
  - (ii) FSME, and
  - (iii) The affected licensee (when appropriate).
- (d) OPA posts the news release to the NRC external Web site and distributes it to news organizations and the public.

**E. Use of Social Media**

- 1. The NRC has enabled the use of selected social media and Web-based interactive technologies such as blogs, wikis, and social networks as another way to enhance public and stakeholder participation in NRC activities and to enable NRC employees to network and interact with professional colleagues.
- 2. When NRC employees use agency assets to engage in social media activities, it is critical that they understand and comply with the NRC's expectations for conducting these interactions. Interim guidance on the use of social media can be found in "Interim Guidance on the Use of Social Media," dated December 28, 2010 (ML103060402).