

February 20, 2013

NOTE TO COMMISSIONERS' ASSISTANTS

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FROM: Kathryn M. Brock */RA/*
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SUBJECT: JANUARY 23, 2013, PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY - POTENTIAL
IMPROVEMENTS IN THE COMMUNICATION OF SIGNIFICANT
REGULATORY ISSUES

In Staff Requirements - SECY-12-0010 issued March 21, 2012, the staff was directed to conduct a public meeting with external stakeholders to receive suggestions on how the NRC could communicate differently and/or more effectively. Toward that purpose, on January 23, 2013, NRC staff conducted a virtual public meeting with a diverse set of stakeholders. Approximately 60 participants took part in the meeting through a telephone bridgeline with approximately 40 also participating through a webinar.

A variety of stakeholders were asked to provide brief opening remarks to the discussion topics, including:

Paul Schmidt, State of Wisconsin
Steven Arndt, Commissioner Ottawa County, OH
Judy Treichel, Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force
Bev Silverberg, President of Beverly R. Silverberg Communications Inc.
Scott Peterson, Nuclear Energy Institute
Tony Nesky, Environmental Protection Agency

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As directed by the Commission, the main discussion topics were:

- Reflections on NRC’s communications since the Fukushima event, including actions the NRC has taken in response to the event;
- Potential actions the NRC might take in the long term to improve stakeholder involvement, such as the establishment of a “standing advisory committee” for that purpose;
- Ways NRC could engage other organizations to establish partnerships to advance public communication and education on topics associated with radiological safety; and
- Non-traditional places/ways the NRC could communicate their message.

Enclosed is a summary of the main ideas expressed by stakeholders and discussion points during the discussions. The staff intends to review the input shared and take appropriate action to address the feasible ideas provided as part of the staff’s normal work. Action on some of the ideas has already begun. The staff will report progress on related follow-up actions through open government briefings and reports.

Enclosure:

As stated

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**PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY
POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE COMMUNICATION OF
SIGNIFICANT REGULATORY ISSUES**

Clarifying Responsibilities

- The NRC should work with other regulators to clarify NRC, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), state, and local responsibilities, both for the public and for those involved. The NRC should make certain the public understands that it is the regulator – not the Department of Energy (DOE) and not the licensee/applicant.
- Federal agencies need to look into a process for establishing a clear process for designating a lead agency and communicating about non-domestic nuclear events.

Technologies

- Using new technologies (such as an online discussion forum) can fall flat. Established mechanisms such as stakeholder meetings can be far more successful. The NRC should determine which communication mechanisms the public would like it to use.
- NRC's website has more information than the average stakeholder needs to know. It can be challenging to find what one is looking for.
- Social media (i.e., videos) at the NRC should be better utilized and expanded. The NRC should use social media to address misstatements.

Public Meetings

- The NRC should transcribe all its public meetings at the local sites. Just “taking notes” is not enough and leaves too much to subjective interpretation.
- The NRC should stop finding ways to exclude the public at meetings where decisions are being made. An example of this is Oyster Creek where there was very little notification of a public meeting to give input and where very viable avenues for advertising the meeting could have been used. Very few knew about the meeting and at the conclusion the NRC spokesperson noted a “lack of public concern” on the issue.
- Because of time constraints at public meetings, the NRC should consider allowing local officials to ask questions/provide comments before others in attendance.
- The Commission should have an annual meeting with the public to get their input on a variety of issues. There should also be a session at the NRC's Regulatory Information Conference (RIC) every year focusing on communication.
- The Commission meeting format is not conducive to discussions between panelists. It is pointless to have briefings where essentially the same views are being provided to the Commission.
- NRC staff members sometimes lose control of public meetings and do not always answer the questions posed.

- NRC staff needs to work past the apparent “fear factor” and address questions at public meetings. Unanswered questions force the public to make their own assumptions/decisions.
- The NRC should examine a different public meeting format rather than simply allowing the public to speak at the end of a meeting. Consider convening an internal group to look at this issue and generate some alternative solutions.

Partnering

- The NRC should take an active role in participating in Health Physics Society (HPS) and American Nuclear Society (ANS)-style events in which their sole purpose is to provide a forum for the public to hear basic information and ask the experts almost any question regarding ionizing radiation. At a minimum, the NRC could establish a booth to promote its mission and answer questions about the agency.

Interactions with Co-Regulators

- The NRC should expand its view of incident response to better address public perception of health and safety. States see public concern escalate almost immediately during a large-scale nuclear/radiation-related incident and may need information very quickly from the NRC (or other federal agencies, as appropriate).
- The NRC has yet to effectively communicate to the states (and others, as appropriate) the answer to the question: If a Fukushima-type incident happened next week, how would the NRC and federal response differ from 2011?
- The NRC should ensure public information officers (PIOs) at all levels (federal, state, local) are connected; periodic regional/local meetings would be a benefit. The NRC should participate in the monthly PIO calls with FEMA. There should be more interaction between local and federal PIOs. When emergencies happen, communication needs to happen quickly and local PIOs need to be supported.

Advisory Committee

- Working with “Community Advisory Committees” could help the NRC better understand local issues and enhance opportunities for “speakers’ forums” to better engage with communities.
- Establishing an Advisory Committee to the Commission on public participation may be just another level of bureaucracy. It’s hard to see how that would help citizens. Allowing citizens to interact directly with NRC staff more often would be more productive.
- Establishing an advisory committee would be great but the NRC needs to ensure state involvement.
- A small advisory group should not be a surrogate for public participation. The NRC should compile a list or database of interested stakeholders. Such a list could have been used for this call. If a big issue comes up, everyone could be apprised and get involved if they can.

General Communications

- People are engaged when there is a fear, typically at a local level, and they want information immediately from someone they trust. The NRC should: use plain language and have clear messages; be clear on what information it considers to be significant and what is not significant; and be factual and direct in its discussions. The NRC should stop using arcane processes and acronyms to obscure meaning.
- The NRC should stop the overstated comparisons between nuclear plant radiation and bananas, pottery, etc.
- Communication with the NRC should be two-way. Communication needs to be with, not from, the NRC.
- The NRC needs to understand the difference between local and national issues that demand broader access.
- The more information people have from a trusted source, the better off everybody is. The more that NRC can be open, honest and factual, the more trust it will receive. It can be challenging for regulatory and enforcement agencies to be resources. Promoting safety can easily be seen as obscuring risk.
- NRC staff sometimes “patronizes” the public, i.e., insisting that things are “safe” while not providing details. Provide the facts and let the public decide for themselves.
- It is okay to admit that “we are all in new territory” when it comes to Fukushima-style events.
- The NRC should consider disseminating information in the form of “here is what we heard from you, is this what you said?”
- The NRC should stop withholding legally available information. An example is Oyster Creek where participant stated that the NRC withheld information that is legally permissible to be distributed to the public after Hurricane Sandy. Some such requests were labeled as “frivolous requests” by the NRC and denied.
- The NRC should have resident inspectors and/or regional staff engage communities to educate citizens. Plant workers do not always have all the information to share when talking with locals around sites.

NRC staff also solicited input through the NRC Blog. To see the comments shared, go to: <http://public-blog.nrc-gateway.gov/2013/01/16/improving-communication-at-the-nrc/>.