

No: 13-098

November 19, 2013

CONTACT: Eliot Brenner, 301-415-8200

Macfarlane Reaffirms NRC Commitment to Safety; Cautions Industry about Budget Impact on Agency

ATLANTA – Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Allison Macfarlane Tuesday acknowledged to nuclear executives that both the NRC and the industry face economic challenges but cautioned that a diligent commitment to nuclear power plant safe and secure operation of must remain paramount.

“Clearly, these are demanding economic times for all of us. But in the face of uncertainty we must continue to demonstrate together that plant safety and security aren’t, and never will be, in jeopardy,” Macfarlane told the CEO conference of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations, an industry organization that focuses on improving nuclear safety.

Macfarlane also said the recent government shutdown created a backlog of non-emergency licensing work and delayed important projects such as the Waste Confidence rule work and post-Fukushima actions.

She added that, “while the recent lapse in federal appropriations is the most recent and most problematic external financial challenge we’ve faced, it is not the only one. For the past year we’ve had to readjust our work in response to required sequestration cuts and unabated continuing resolutions. We’re now facing the possibility of another year of sequestration at even more austere funding levels. ... The combination of well-grounded immediate priorities and constrained and unpredictable annual budgeting means that important long-term focused work simply isn’t going to get done.”

“In some cases, it could mean additional delays – in others it means certain activities may be temporarily suspended. ... The commission recognizes this, and we’re working to ensure that we continue to have the ability to do as much as we can with the resources we have.”

In her [remarks](#) Macfarlane also highlighted:

- Appreciation for INPO’s emphasis on the link between strong plant management and consistent plant performance, and for the industry’s work to implement lessons learned from the Fukushima accident.
- Overall nuclear power plants continued to perform well, but there are a few trends of concern attributable to systemic issues, such as maintenance practices for aging equipment.

- The Commission this week decided how the agency will proceed on the Yucca Mountain issue.
- The NRC has received “valuable input” from a variety of perspectives at public meetings on the Waste Confidence issue.
- The agency is monitoring domestic and international concerns about counterfeit and fraudulent parts and challenged both industry and the NRC staff to “maintain a shared commitment to vigilant vendor inspection.”
- The NRC has “worked closely with industry and Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies on an integrated [emergency] response program for nuclear power plants. In the past year in particular, closer cooperation between industry and the various government entities has yielded good results and the program is advancing.”
- Operators of plants undergoing decommissioning should “engage with the public and be transparent about decision-making.”
- All facility operators “should be more proactive in engaging interested parties in their communities. I think there’s a clear linkage between continued, productive dialogue and the establishment of mutual trust in a particular community.”