

From: Burnell, Scott
Sent: Thursday, May 22, 2014 11:51 AM
To: colldm@gmail.com
Subject: RE: your e-mail to the NRC

Hello Mr. Collins:

The NRC understands your May 7 e-mail (available in the NRC's electronic document database, [ADAMS](#), under accession No. ML14128A432) questions the NRC's ability to independently oversee the U.S. civilian use of nuclear materials. Specifically, you cited the Wikipedia entry on "regulatory capture" referring to the regulation of nuclear power.

As an independent regulatory agency, our robust and comprehensive approach holds U.S. nuclear power plants to strict safety standards. The NRC never wavers from its primary mission of ensuring the public's health and safety during any civilian use of radioactive material. The NRC carries out that mission by requiring every U.S. reactor to meet safety requirements. In many cases those requirements are based on standards created and maintained by national professional organizations. For instance, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers' codes have been incorporated into requirements for reactor vessels and reactor coolant piping, while the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' codes apply to computer systems. The NRC only approves (by regulation) changes to those standards if the changes continue to reasonably assure the agency the public will remain adequately protected. In some cases the NRC has required that the new codes be used only in conjunction with additional NRC-approved safety conditions.

The NRC has addressed the issue of safety culture mentioned in your e-mail. The agency issued its policy on safety culture in June 2011, and the policy statement included input from Commissioner George Apostolakis (quoted in your e-mail), who was confirmed as a Commissioner in 2010. More information on the NRC's approach to safety culture is available on the agency website at: <http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/safety-culture.html>

The NRC also inspects each nuclear power plant, and takes regulatory action (including enforcement action) where necessary, if the NRC identifies a potential safety or security concern. One example is the sequence of events following the severe corrosion incident at the Davis-Besse nuclear power plant – a case where the licensee, FirstEnergy, was fined \$5.5 million for lying to the NRC and failing to follow critical agency requirements. The NRC kept Davis-Besse shut down for several years until the plant's damaged reactor vessel head was replaced and other required repairs were done. When later inspections revealed that the replacement head was also showing degradation, the NRC then ensured FirstEnergy accelerated its plans to install a brand-new reactor vessel head that utilizes a more corrosion-resistant alloy. The NRC also recently kept the Fort Calhoun nuclear power plant shut down for more than a year to ensure the plant addressed several operational issues. When the Tennessee Valley Authority sought permission to restart the long-dormant Browns Ferry Unit 1 reactor, the NRC required years of analysis and maintenance before the agency was satisfied the reactor was suitable for operation.

The agency operates in an open and transparent manner, reaching decisions based on the best available information and analysis. The general public, interest groups, Congress and nuclear utilities all provide input and information for the agency's deliberations. We make safety-significant decisions without regard for potential economic impacts on plant operators. The NRC

sets appropriate technical requirements using impartial professional standards, expertise and analysis. We have inspectors working daily at every nuclear power plant in the country and we enforce our requirements to ensure the public remains safe.

Scott Burnell
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