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NRC Report Focuses on Agency's Future

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has released its [Project Aim 2020 report](#), detailing a staff-developed look at the agency's future designed to improve the agency's agility, effectiveness and efficiency while ensuring its ability to protect the public health and safety.

The Project Aim report identifies 17 recommended strategies under the themes of people, planning, and process to prepare the NRC for the future. The staff's report concludes that the NRC needs to function more efficiently by: right-sizing the agency to retain appropriate skill sets needed to accomplish its mission; streamlining agency processes to use resources more wisely; improving timeliness in regulatory decision making and responding quickly to changing conditions; and promoting unity of purpose with clearer agency-wide priorities.

Commissioners and NRC senior staff will publicly discuss the report during a briefing later today. Chairman Stephen G. Burns welcomed the report, but emphasized its recommendations are merely the beginning of the NRC's effort to position itself for the future.

"This study gives us a starting point for our Commission discussions about how to position the agency for a different environment and different challenges," Burns said. "We will start that dialogue, but I want to be clear about one thing – in determining the size of this agency in the future we will not take any step that would compromise our mission of protecting the American people and our environment."

In the coming weeks, the Commission will consider the recommendations of Project Aim and give direction to the staff on its implementation. The report proposes implementing the strategies during the next couple of years. The report projects that the NRC could be about 10 percent smaller in 2020 with a suggested workforce of about 3,400 employees ("full-time equivalents"), compared to 3,677 projected for fiscal year 2015 and 3,976 employees at the height of the agency's expansion in FY 2010.

With Commission support, Project Aim was established last June to develop proposals for repositioning the NRC in a dynamic environment. The effort was supported by Mark Satorius, NRC's executive director for operations, and Maureen Wylie, the agency's chief financial officer. The NRC expanded over the past decade, anticipating a wave of new reactor license and other applications. Changing economic conditions, especially reduced prices for natural gas, led to declining interest in constructing new nuclear plants.

The Project Aim report was developed by a small team of experienced staff experts working with a “guiding coalition” of senior staff and management.

The Project Aim team conducted outreach to external parties, other federal agencies, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), and Chapter 208 of the National Treasury Employees Union. The team performed an analysis comparing the current state of the agency and the challenges and trends the agency may need to face between now and 2020. The analysis included interviews with senior NRC managers and 23 focus groups of staff members. It yielded more than 2,000 suggestions, strategies and observations the team used to formulate its report.

Further evaluation of the report by NAPA is expected in March. The Commission will provide a report to Congress in May.