

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

| MD 5.5 | PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAM | DT-18-09 |
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| <i>Volume 5:</i> | Governmental Relations and Public Affairs | |
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| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | | |
| Management Directive 5.5, "Public Affairs Program," has been updated to include social media guidance. | | |

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For updates or revisions to policies contained in this MD that were issued after the MD was signed, please see the Yellow Announcement to Management Directive index ([YA-to-MD index](#)).

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. When NRC employees 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. All use of information technology must comply with guidance found in Management Directive (MD) 12.5, "NRC Cybersecurity Program."
- C. 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 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 communication tools to influence pending legislation, promote product sales, or promote the status of various industries.

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 on 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 the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) of any changes to news releases. Provides comments/changes to OPA on 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)

Provides legal advice for any draft news releases or other proposed public communication tools, 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. Advises the Chairman, the Commission, and the EDO on best practices 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; conducts and participates in relevant workshops and seminars.
6. Arranges interviews with reporters of the Chairman, other top officials, and technical experts, as needed.
7. Reviews, and is consulted on, any decision by offices to deny a request from the news media for information.
8. Issues all NRC news releases and posts them to the NRC's Web site; maintains NRC news releases, speeches, and other NRC documents of public and media interest on NRC's Web site; and coordinates the content of NRC's Web site home page with the Office of the Executive Director for Operations (OEDO) and the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO).

9. Oversees the NRC social media program including—
 - (a) Designating specific OPA staff to establish and manage agency platforms and post content, and determining which sites/platforms will be used for NRC communication.
 - (b) Ensuring adherence to Federal records and paperwork reduction regulations in posting, maintaining and archiving content on NRC platforms, and ensuring that content excludes prohibited verbiage including but not limited to allegations, threats, personal attacks, political campaigning, surveys, and collection of PII.
 - (c) Ensuring that OPA employees work with offices and regions wanting to initiate sub-agency-level Twitter accounts.
 - (d) Ensuring OPA staff assists employees wishing to post content on social media sites not managed by the NRC to, as appropriate, ensure consistency of messages, benefit of the posting to the agency, and clear separation between personal opinion and official NRC information.
 - (e) Ensuring development of and adherence to standard operating procedures for social media platforms used by the NRC.
10. Plans, directs, and coordinates the activities of public affairs officers (PAOs) located at NRC regional offices. These regional PAOs are OPA employees.

E. Office Directors

1. Coordinate with the Director, 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;
 - (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 Web site (<http://www.nrc.gov>) that will likely be of interest to the public.

2. Advise the Director, OPA, of communications between the NRC and other organizations or individuals that are likely to have public information implications, including communications transmitted through social media.
3. Provide prompt information and assistance to the Director, OPA, in preparing and releasing statements on NRC-relevant accidents and incidents.
4. Determine the appropriate level of office review of draft news releases and other public materials for accuracy and completeness.
5. Ensure that when NRC employees engage in social media activities, they understand and comply with the NRC's expectations for conducting these interactions, and when appropriate, engage OPA.
6. Identify employees to participate in work-related social media activities, with OPA input. Ensure that OPA is notified of inappropriate, misleading, or inaccurate information about the NRC on social media platforms not managed by OPA so a determination of a response can be made.

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

Internal Commission Procedures, available at
<http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/policy-making/internal.html>.

Management Directive 12.5, "NRC Cybersecurity Program."

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

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

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Agencywide Rules of Behavior for Authorized Computer Use ([ML17244A084](#)).

United States Code and Public Laws

Federal Records Act (44 U.S.C. Chapter 31).

National Archives and Records Administration Guidance on Managing Social Media Records, available at
<https://www.digitalgov.gov/resources/nara-guidance-on-managing-social-media-records/>

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501 et seq.).

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

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION DIRECTIVE HANDBOOK (DH)

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I. NEWS RELEASES

- A. 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.

For updates or revisions to policies contained in this MD that were issued after the MD was signed, please see the Yellow Announcement to Management Directive index ([YA-to-MD index](#)).

- B. To communicate information effectively, news releases should be written clearly, in plain language. The 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>).
- C. 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 organizational and senior management changes.

II. PREPARATION AND ISSUANCE OF NEWS RELEASES

- A. 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—
 1. Commission decision papers (i.e., Office of the Secretary of the Commission (SECY) papers) and concomitant staff requirements memoranda (SRMs),
 2. Correspondence with licensees or Congress,
 3. Executive Director for Operations (EDO) Updates,
 4. Public meeting notices and *Federal Register* notices,
 5. Inspection reports and NUREGs,
 6. Plant performance evaluations,
 7. Commissioner facility visits, and
 8. NRC employee announcements.
- B. Technical offices review news releases for accuracy. OPA ensures releases are written in plain language and convey information of interest to the public in journalistic style.

III. NEWS RELEASES INVOLVING SECY PAPERS

- A. 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 news 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 (available at <http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/policy-making/internal.html>).
- B. The originating office determines the appropriate level of office review of a news release. That office also determines whether another office, such as the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), should review the news release. If needed, the originating office should obtain the additional review and resolve any comments before forwarding to OPA, in a timely manner, a single set of comments. OPA prefers to receive only one set of comments on the news release from the originating office.
- C. 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.
- D. OPA must have on file the same version of the news release that goes forward to the Commission.
- E. 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 the Commission voting record are made available to the public. As soon as possible after the Commission's decision has been made public, OPA issues a final news release after making any changes requested by the Commission or that are 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.
- F. OPA gives advance notice of the pending publication of final news releases to an e-mail group that includes offices with specific stakeholder constituents, such as the Office of Congressional Affairs (OCA) and the Office of International Programs (OIP). A short time later, OPA posts the news release to the NRC Web site (<http://www.nrc.gov>) and distributes it to news organizations, NRC employees, the Public Document Room, certain trade publications, nuclear industry contacts, public interest groups, and other interested parties through a self-subscribing Listserv available on the NRC Web site.

IV. OTHER SOURCES FOR NEWS RELEASES

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

1. Content

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

- (a) Enforcement actions,
- (b) Plant performance evaluations,
- (c) Event inspections, and
- (d) High-interest public meetings.

2. Coordination and Approval Required

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

B. News Releases Dealing With a Specific Licensed Facility

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

- 1. Typically, a public affairs officer in the region drafts the news release.
- 2. OPA and regional management then review and approve the news release, before it is sent to the Chairman's office for review, if necessary.
- 3. OPA sends an advance copy of the news release to OCA and other offices by request, and to the affected licensee, if appropriate.
- 4. OPA posts the news release to the NRC public Web site and distributes it to news organizations and the public.

V. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A. The NRC has enabled the use of selected social media and Web-based interactive technologies, such as blogs and social networks, as another way to enhance external communication to ensure transparency and assist the public to understand the activities of the agency.

B. When NRC employees use agency assets to engage in social media activities, it is critical that they understand and comply with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Agencywide Rules of Behavior for Authorized Computer Use ([ML17244A084](#)).

- C.** OPA establishes NRC official sites and accounts and oversees the use of social media services used for NRC official communication. In coordination with OPA, NRC offices may designate authorized NRC employees to work with OPA to create content for these platforms. Similar to the process used for managing the NRC Web site, this allows the agency to establish a single point-of-contact for the public to interact with the NRC on specific social media platforms, while allowing for the decentralized creation of content. In some very limited cases, individual NRC offices may create their own Twitter accounts in consultation with OPA.