



CHAIRMAN

UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

November 18, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am submitting the report for the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 related to the NRC's progress on certain licensing actions and right-sizing commitments consistent with the direction first included in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, and continued in Senate Report 116-102 accompanying the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020.

The Joint Explanatory Statement directed the Commission to report on the following: 1) "the on-board strength of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees, including any identified areas of critical skill shortages and targeted hiring strategies against these shortage areas"; 2) "the actions taken to right-size the NRC in accordance with the recommendations of the Project Aim report, to include re-baselining assumptions and projection of FTEs and required budget authority"; 3) "the progress to eliminate the backlog of pending licensing actions in the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation by 2017"; and 4) "the progress to complete the licensing reviews of pending reactor license renewal applications (power and research reactors), combined license applications, early site permit applications, design certification applications, and uranium recovery applications (initial and renewal) against currently projected schedules."

As noted in the previous quarterly report, the FY 2020 staffing level in the agency's enacted appropriation is 2,979 FTE. In FY 2020, the NRC utilized 2,790 FTE, which is approximately 130 FTE below the FY 2019 utilization. The FTE resources cited include the Office of the Inspector General resources.

Since FY 2014, the NRC's workforce has declined considerably, from 3,741 to 2,790 FTE. In recent years, the hiring of additional agency staff has been limited to those skills that are critical to the agency operations or not available within the existing agency workforce. The NRC has implemented a Strategic Workforce Planning process to improve our efforts in developing and managing the NRC workforce and to balance near-term work with long-term staffing projections. The process projects the amount and type of work anticipated over the next 5 years and identifies the skills needed in the workforce to perform that work. Through this process, both short- and long-term workforce planning strategies are developed to inform the agency's efforts to recruit, retain, and develop a skilled and diverse workforce with the competencies and agility to address both current and emerging needs and workload fluctuations.

The agency recently used its newly established Nuclear Regulatory Apprenticeship Network (NRAN) Program to hire 23 entry-level employees. The overall goal of the NRAN Program is to recruit, hire, and develop college graduates over a 2-year period to supply the agency's technical offices with new personnel to fill critical skill gaps and/or projected future office vacancies. Given the projected attrition over the next 5 years, NRAN will help us to avoid skills gaps and to ensure that the NRC is appropriately staffed to carry out our safety mission into the future. Additional external hiring will also be necessary as attrition continues.

During this reporting period, the NRC continued to take precautionary measures in response to the declared COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) in the United States to help ensure the health and safety of our workforce. These measures are consistent with guidance provided by the Federal Government, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as State and local authorities. Activities included transitioning to Phase 2 of the Re-Occupancy Plan at NRC headquarters, Region I, and Region III¹ and phasing resident inspectors back into nuclear plants, the Vogtle Electric Generating Plant Units 3 and 4 construction site, and Category 1 fuel fabrication facilities to resume their regular in-person activities that were limited at a number of sites earlier in the COVID-19 PHE.

Additionally, the NRC staff has notified licensees of processes available to request certain temporary accommodations necessitated by the COVID-19 PHE. Notification was accomplished in a transparent way through public communications, such as teleconferences and letters. These efforts included providing licensees with information to facilitate the expedited review of requests for temporary exemptions to work-hour limits to allow flexibility in maintaining an appropriate workforce to meet the NRC's minimum reactor operator and security staffing requirements. A complete list of these processes and temporary modifications approved by the NRC is available on the NRC public website at <https://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/covid-19/>. The NRC also deferred billing of annual fees and fees for services for the 90-day period of April through June 2020. Billing of these deferred fees resumed in July 2020. Future reports will include additional details on NRC activities resulting from or affected by the COVID- 19 PHE.

The status of licensing activities is provided in Enclosure 1. The NRC's continued activities resulting from Project Aim are described in Enclosure 2.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me or have your staff contact Eugene Dacus, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,



Kristine L. Svinicki

Enclosures:
As stated

cc: Senator Patrick Leahy

¹ Region II, Region IV, and the Technical Training Center remain in Phase 1 in light of State and local conditions.