

**POLICY ISSUE**  
**NOTATION VOTE**

**RESPONSE SHEET**

**TO:** Brooke P. Clark, Secretary  
**FROM:** Commissioner Baran  
**SUBJECT:** SECY-22-0087: Recommendation for Problem Identification and Resolution Team Inspection Frequency

Approved  X  Disapproved      Abstain      Not Participating    

**COMMENTS:** Below      Attached  X  None    

**Entered in STAR**

Yes  X   
No    

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

1/20/23

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Commissioner Baran's Comments on SECY-22-0087, "Recommendation for Problem Identification and Resolution Team Inspection Frequency"

NRC's problem identification and resolution (PI&R) inspections are one of the most important elements of the agency's oversight of nuclear power plants. This critical inspection evaluates the adequacy of a plant's corrective action program. It is designed to ensure that a plant can identify, prioritize, evaluate, and fix problems – capabilities that are essential to safe operation. The PI&R inspection is also the only baseline NRC inspection that examines a nuclear power plant's safety culture. PI&R program performance is recognized as a "leading indicator in overall [Reactor Oversight Process] performance."<sup>1</sup> In fact, nuclear power plants having effective PI&R programs is a basic assumption of the Reactor Oversight Process. And the inspection has proven very useful. According to the NRC staff, "the PI&R inspection procedure yields the most findings of any baseline procedure when combining annual ... and team inspection ... samples."<sup>2</sup>

Based on a comprehensive review of the PI&R inspection program and feedback from NRC inspectors, the staff recommends maintaining the biennial frequency of the PI&R inspection (Option 1). I agree. The PI&R inspection is at the heart of what NRC does to ensure that nuclear power plants operate safely. The staff has not identified any data that supports reducing the frequency of the inspection, and none of the inspector feedback forms suggested less frequent inspections.<sup>3</sup> As the staff notes, reducing the inspection frequency could "result in missed opportunities to identify poor performance in the broader PI&R program sooner."<sup>4</sup> It is crucial that NRC maintain its ability to spot corrective action program weaknesses and promptly detect any adverse trends in a plant's safety culture. For these reasons, I approve the staff's well-supported recommendation.

For the same reasons, we should re-visit a 2020 staff decision to reduce the PI&R biennial team inspection hours from 250 to 180.<sup>5</sup> Although it is scheduled for implementation in the 2024 inspection cycle, the staff did not provide a safety case for this 28% reduction in inspection hours. Given the significant value provided by the PI&R biennial team inspection, the staff should not implement this scheduled reduction. Instead, the staff should maintain the current number of inspection hours for this vital inspection.

This is also the right time to address another planned reduction in NRC oversight. Since the ROP began, NRC Resident Inspectors have been performing post-maintenance and surveillance testing inspections. Post-maintenance testing is key to showing that maintenance conducted on risk-significant structures, systems, and components (SSCs) does not affect the operability and functionality of the system, and that the SSCs will operate reliably when required. Surveillance testing ensures that these SSCs remain capable of performing their intended safety function after being in standby service. Recently, the NRC staff combined the baseline inspection procedures for post-maintenance testing and surveillance testing into one inspection procedure. The post-maintenance testing procedure had required a minimum of 20 samples per year and 71 inspection hours at a site. The surveillance testing procedure had required a minimum of 14 samples per year and 100 inspection hours per site. The combined

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<sup>1</sup> SECY-22-0087 at 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum to Ho Nieh, Director of the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation at 2 (Nov. 12, 2020) (ADAMS Accession No. ML20274A133).

procedure would require a minimum of 24 samples and 135 inspection hours per year at a site, an overall reduction of 10 samples and 35 hours per site. Moreover, the combined procedure would reduce the minimum number of samples related to post-maintenance testing from 20 to 4 per year, an 80% cut. Like the planned PI&R inspection hour reductions, the staff has not presented a convincing safety case for combining these important inspections in a way that reduces overall inspection samples and hours. The staff should not continue to implement these changes to samples and hours in the post-maintenance and surveillance testing inspection procedure without prior Commission approval.