

NRR Results of Licensee Survey

Background Information

The Commission approved the conduct of an independent survey (SRM-COMNJD-02-0001) after reviewing the results of the regulatory impact process, one of the staff's processes that solicits feedback from utility managers. The objective of the survey was to augment NRC's normal communication channels to gain insights into the impact of regulatory activities. The survey consisted of twenty satisfaction questions and two free-verse questions. The free-verse questions allowed respondents to elaborate on specific areas of dissatisfaction and to provide any additional comments they wished to submit.

This paper communicates the results of that survey.

Summary

Overall, the survey results indicate that utility managers are generally satisfied with NRC regulatory activities, except in the area of fire protection. Overall, 60 percent of the responses expressed satisfaction (either generally satisfied or very satisfied), 23 percent were neutral, 10 percent were unsatisfied (generally dissatisfied or very dissatisfied), and the remaining 7 percent considered the activities as "not applicable."

Managers expressed the greatest amount of satisfaction with the quality of inspections and inspection reports, followed by communications during formal meetings, workshops, and conferences. Managers expressed the least satisfaction in the fire protection area, the only area that received higher levels of dissatisfaction than satisfaction. Evaluating responses, by position, revealed only one item of interest; licensing managers expressed almost three-quarters of the "very unsatisfied" responses.

Summary of Written Comments

While managers offered both complimentary and critical comments, the majority of the comments involved issues that caused dissatisfaction. Over a quarter of the critical comments involved either the handling or timeliness of licensing actions. Managers complained about the timeliness and predictability of the process, and recommended more management involvement to oversee the process for requesting additional information and to increase the use of precedent licensing actions.

Managers also raised concerns with fire protection activities and the quality of inspections. Ten percent of the comments dealt with fire protection activities, primarily with the clarity of regulatory requirements and the length of time to resolve issues. Although the quality-of-inspection area received the highest satisfaction ratings, it also received ten percent of the comments, dealing mainly with perceived inconsistencies between regional offices in the implementation of inspections. Several managers praised the reactor oversight process (ROP) and the overall quality of NRC employees.

Five managers raised concerns with security orders, including the number of orders, and the need for more timely and complete communication with the industry.

Consistency with Other Feedback

Overall, the survey results were similar to those received through other communication channels, such as the ongoing regulatory impact process, External Survey, Licensing Action Task Force, and ROP meetings. Licensee feedback from these communication channels were similar regarding the effectiveness of fire protection activities, formal communications, inspection quality, ROP, significance determination process, and safeguards activities.

Licensee Response

The survey solicited a response from the following four managers: operations, engineering, licensing, and overall plant management. A total of 76 managers responded to the survey representing 40 out of the 104 reactor units at 66 sites. The response by position follows:

Operations manager: 15
Licensing manager: 29
Engineering manager: 14
Plant manager: 18

Although anonymity prevents the determination of a specific response rate, the rate is between 38 percent (which assumes a separate response from each unit on a site or 40/104) and 61 percent (which assumes a separate response from each multi-unit site or 40/66). The actual response rate is probably closer to 38 percent, since most licensees participating in the survey would respond for all units.

Evaluation and Actions

The survey was useful in generating specific feedback on a broad range of NRC activities. The survey results tend to validate the effectiveness of current communication with the industry in that survey results were similar to those received through other communication channels and through the regulatory impact process. The survey results and written comments were sent to the regional offices and other affected offices for their consideration and action.

These survey results will be included in the next annual self-assessment of the ROP, scheduled for issuance in spring 2005.