

March 14, 1997

MEMORANDUM TO: William M. Beecher
Director, Office of Public Affairs

L. Joseph Callan
Executive Director for Operations

Karen D. Cyr
General Counsel

Anthony J. Galante
Chief Information Officer

Ronald M. Scroggins
Acting Chief Financial Officer

FROM: John C. Hoyle, Secretary /s/

SUBJECT: STAFF REQUIREMENTS - COMSECY-96-063 - STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT ISSUE PAPER:PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVES (DSI 14)

A goal in public communication is to foster the public's understanding of, and build public trust and confidence in, NRC's regulatory oversight and activities designed to protect public health and safety in the use of nuclear materials. Therefore, the NRC should place a priority on early identification of public concerns and methods for public interaction in making regulatory decisions that are likely to generate substantial public interest or concern (Option 2). Additional resources should not be committed to NRC's public communications efforts unless they (additional resources) are considered and included in the final NRC budget for FY 1999 through 2001. The NRC should interpret the term "public" in its broadest sense, understand who our various publics are, and focus on what they need in order to facilitate interaction and dissemination of information. For this purpose, the public includes private citizens, interest groups, licensees, states, media, congress, the executive branch, and the international community.

Much of the agency's public communication disseminated by other than the NRC's public communication professionals is very dense, extremely difficult to understand, and not very useful to the non-technical public. There is a substantial need for constant efforts to improve the agency's public communications within existing resources. In this work, recognition should be given to both bilateral formal and informal communication, and particular attention should be given to review and improvement of formal communication. The appropriate role of technology as a facilitating/enabling device should be carefully examined within this context (e.g. particular care should be given to considering the forms of information dissemination such that the NRC does not eliminate paper in favor of electronic communication without full consideration of the public's ability to access information electronically). Although there should be centralized planning and coordination of a methodology for anticipating and involving the public in regulatory matters and decisionmaking, responsibility for implementing the methodology should reside with the program offices. The roles of the line organization and the Office of Public Affairs in facilitating public responsiveness should be clearly understood.

Consistent with this approach, the NRC should focus on maximizing effectiveness and economy in its existing program for public responsiveness (Option 1a), and in anticipating and involving the public (Option 2). The NRC should pursue a course of implementation using existing resources to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of activities that are of highest cost, and perform better assessments of proposed improvements to the existing approach. As an improvement, the NRC should develop a comparative risk vocabulary that can answer the simple questions, "What is my risk?" and "How safe is the facility?." The staff should consider the report of the Presidential/Congressional Commission on Risk Assessment and Risk Management in this effort.

General public outreach (Option 3) could be useful and could become more so as the NRC is directed to take on additional responsibilities. This should be pursued as existing resources allow. In pursuing general public outreach, the staff should devote particular attention to assuring the clarity for the general public of the NRC's programs, activities, and policies. We should promote public understanding of the responsibilities of the agency and how they are discharged.

To assist in centralized planning and coordination, the Executive Council should establish a coordinating group and oversee development of a plan to implement the Commission's final decision. The plan should include performance goals and measures to assess the effectiveness of the program, consideration of the experience of the private sector and other public agencies, and consideration of the comments received on this direction setting issue suggesting improvement in existing practices. The plan should be sent to the Commission.

(CIO/EDO/OPA/OGC/CFO)

(SECY Suspense: 12/31/97)

As a separate matter, the EDO should consider the comments concerning the 2.206 process, in particular the potential for an NRC employee to be reviewing their own work in responding to a 2.206 petition, in the ongoing review of this process.

cc: Chairman Jackson
Commissioner Rogers
Commissioner Dicus
Commissioner McGaffigan
Commissioner Diaz
D. Rathbun (OCA)
H. Bell (OIG)