

March 5, 1999

FOR: The Commissioners

FROM: William D. Travers /s/
Executive Director for Operations

SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVE (DSI-14)

PURPOSE:

This paper provides an implementation plan to the Commission for approved tasks in the Public Communications Initiative (DSI-14), and informs the Commission of the plan.

BACKGROUND:

SECY-98-089 contained a plan to implement the Commission's policy guidance in Direction Setting Issue #14, "Public Communications Initiatives." That paper divided the public communications recommendations into five broad categories: (1) clarity and timeliness of communications, (2) the public involvement process, (3) responsiveness to public inquiries, (4) public access to information, and (5) public outreach.

The paper, [SECY-98-089](#), was forwarded to the Commission for approval. A Staff Requirements Memorandum (SRM) dated September 10, 1998, was then sent to the staff. This SRM approved the recommendations, with a few exceptions, and requested a more specific implementation plan. This paper, with its attachments, forwards the requested plan.

DISCUSSION:

In developing a more specific implementation plan, we examined the direction given in SECY-98-089 and the corresponding SRM. Four principal themes were identified: (1) develop a short and flexible implementation plan, (2) ensure offices and regions have the responsibility for implementation of this plan, (3) integrate tasks into existing programs to maximize the use of limited resources, and (4) focus on clarity and sensitivity to public concerns. As directed in the SRM, the role of the Deputy Executive Director for Regulatory Effectiveness (DEDE) has been expanded to include public communications. In this role, the DEDE has taken responsibility for developing this implementation plan for the initiatives in SECY-98-089, provided as an attachment to this paper. A summary table of the tasks is given as an appendix in the attachment.

As you know, the NRC is evaluating the benefit of measuring outcomes against a set of four criteria. These criteria are: (1) maintaining safety, (2) reducing unnecessary regulatory burden, (3) increasing efficiency and effectiveness, and (4) increasing public confidence. The public confidence criterion was considered in developing this implementation plan.

The staff recognizes that the methods of communicating to the public, with clarity and sensitivity, are as important as the content of the message. The Commission directed that the plan include general principles for effective communications with the public which are simple. Examples include being able to tell citizens what risk licensees pose to them, how safe the facilities are, and how those risks might be judged. The unifying theme of the tasks to enhance public communications will be clarity and sensitivity to public concerns. The staff will be asked to try to put themselves in the position of an intelligent, but technically uninformed member of the public. What if that staff member had to evaluate a risk posed from an unfamiliar source? This risk could be a biological weapons storage facility in their neighborhood or a shipment of toxic chemical waste through their town. What questions would they need to have answered to provide reassurance of the safety of the activity? The staff will be asked to keep these questions in mind as they develop communications products in response to the SECY-98-089 recommendations.

The principal products of this implementation plan are guidance to the staff, training classes, the Public Involvement Handbook (Task IIB2), and presentation materials. These public involvement tools will prepare the staff to convey information effectively to the public. Techniques for communicating risk to the public will be presented in the products developed under this implementation plan. This type of guidance will be presented in the Public Involvement Handbook, and the training classes that will use the Handbook as a teaching aid.

The fundamental purpose of the plan is to improve external communications, but some tasks focus on improving our internal communications, to support stronger external communications. There are other initiatives underway that focus more on improving internal communications, but are not discussed in depth in this paper. This implementation plan has been closely coordinated with the other initiatives.

The agency is also involved in the President's Plain Language Action Plan, to improve our external communications. Many of the approved tasks in the public communications implementation plan can help us fulfill our commitments in the Plain Language Action Plan. By following the guidance given in the Plain Language Action Plan, the products developed from the tasks will help us to improve the quality, clarity, and credibility of agency communications. Specific tasks that will help us fulfill these commitments are:

Task IA3 - High profile reports - inclusion of an executive summary in plain English

Task IA4 - Public meetings - inclusion of a brief tutorial

Task IB1 - Update glossary of nuclear expressions on NRC web page

Task IB2 - Distribute the glossary to all NRC employees with guidance to limit use of jargon

Task IB3 - Convey findings in a balanced way, neither overstating nor minimizing concerns

Task IC1 - Include a performance appraisal element for public communications

HIGHLIGHTS OF COMPLETED OR ONGOING ACTIVITIES:

- Review of the plant status reports by the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR) was completed 12/1/98. This review provided the opportunity to improve communications to the public by removing unnecessary information. (Task IVB1)
- Glossary of nuclear expressions were posted on external NRC website 9/97. This glossary will be updated annually. (Tasks IB1, IB2)
- Beginning January 1, 1999, all rulemaking packages include a standard paragraph soliciting feedback from the public on the clarity of the documents. (Task IIA1)
- Public Involvement Processes class was developed by contractor and offered to staff 6/98. (Task IIC1)
- Central audiovisual library is currently being developed. First phase of project, a repository of photographs, will be available 5/99. (Task VA2)
- Student corner of the NRC website is currently being expanded. Updated version of webpage will be posted in 5/99. (Task VA4)

FUTURE OF PLAN:

This paper conveys the February 1999 version of this implementation plan. It is expected that it will take over two years to complete the tasks with specific milestones. Some of the tasks will be ongoing, but the staff does not expect this implementation plan to continue indefinitely. Instead, the staff expects that the focus and tasks of this implementation plan will become institutionalized in our processes of public communications. The part of this plan that will continue is that the DEDE will continue to be responsible for ensuring the staff pursues a strong public communications program. The tasks of this plan will be monitored over time to see that its commitments are realized. To ensure that this implementation plan is meeting the objectives of SECY-98-089 and the associated SRM, the DEDE will review the progress of the tasks and provide a report to the Commission on July 1, 1999.

RESOURCES:

Many of the recommendations approved from SECY-98-089 can be implemented with existing or minimal additional resources. Many products consist of reviews and revisions of guidance documents for internal and external communications, and can be performed at minimal staff expenditures. These staff expenditures were estimated from negligible to approximately 0.2 FTE in SECY-98-089. Some tasks, such as the preparation of a Public Involvement Handbook and the development of videotapes, involve a larger expenditure of unbudgeted resources. Funds for the handbook will be considered in the current budget cycle. Funds for videotapes will be considered in the upcoming FY2001 budget review based on their likely contribution to public confidence goals and costs.

The Executive Council (EC) directed the staff to look for ways that existing training courses could be revised to minimize the resources necessary for this implementation plan. OPA and Office of Human Resources (HR) reviewed the communications training courses, and found that there are no existing courses that fulfill the objectives in SECY-98-089. HR has earmarked funds in the current budget for two new courses on improved communications techniques (Tasks IA1/IA2). Implementation and training strategy for public involvement processes (Tasks IE1 and IIC1) will be developed after the Public Involvement Handbook is completed. Recommendations for class timing and attendance will be considered as part of the overall integrated training schedule.

COORDINATION:

This plan has been coordinated with the Office of Public Affairs (OPA), as directed by the Commission. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) and the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) have no objections. The Office of the General Counsel (OGC) has no legal objection to this paper.

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Attachment: [Public Communications Implementation Plan](#) 