



NRC NEWS

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“GUIDING PRINCIPLES: CULTURE, TRANSPARENCY, AND COMMUNICATION”

Prepared Remarks by

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before the

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Introduction

My fellow Commissioners, distinguished members of the public, stakeholder organizations, NRC staff, the media and our foreign guests, it is an honor for me to join you for the first time at the Regulatory Information Conference.

I would like to talk today about how I intend to execute my duties as a Commissioner of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. I intend to be fair and open-minded, to rely on my knowledge of science and public policy, and to consider a triangle of three core guiding principles that are rooted in the mission statement of the NRC – a safety and security culture, transparency and communication.

But before I go into detail about my approach to the job, there is an important issue I need to address. I would like to publicly express my deep disappointment with many of the newspaper articles written about me over the last few years as I was considered for nomination to the Commission. I was deeply disturbed by them, and I will tell you why. They never, ever, provided you with an accurate description of how to say my name. So, for the record, it is pronounced "Yatsko."

Now that we have gotten that important issue out of the way, let me talk about how I intend to do my job.

I look forward to continuing to build productive and collaborative relationships with the industry and stakeholder groups represented here. With respect to the industry, the benefits you provide to our society in terms of energy self-sufficiency, safety, and technological innovation are numerous. I intend to work with you to ensure that the NRC's regulations continue to efficiently promote the safety and security of your nuclear facilities. The role that public interest groups and state and local governments play is also crucial – you represent the wishes of the American people by ensuring the safe, secure and reliable use of nuclear materials. I look forward to hearing your views on the issues facing the NRC and ensuring that your concerns receive the attention they deserve.

And last – but certainly not least – I am honored to be here with the NRC staff. After 6 weeks of working side-by-side with you at headquarters and out in the regions, I am impressed by your expertise, dedication and devotion to the vital mission of our agency. The fact that most of the employees I have met have been with the agency for many years shows the commitment you have. Your activities really are the glue that holds the entire regulatory framework together. I will work to foster a sense of trust and openness between you and your Commission that will ensure the NRC can continue to be a world-class organization.

From a public policy perspective, the nuclear industry is a great example of an arena in which democratic and free market values intersect. The interaction between the public, licensees, and all levels of government that has resulted in the safe, secure, efficient, and beneficial use of radioactive materials is an example of how our system of government is the best that society has yet been able to develop.

Mission Statement

The NRC's role in this process is clearly defined in our mission statement that has evolved out of decades of guidance from Congress. Let me remind you of what that mission statement is:

“ The mission of the NRC is to license and regulate the Nation's civilian use of byproduct, source, and special nuclear materials to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety, promote the common defense and security, and protect the environment.”

I believe this is a concise and powerful statement. Our challenge is to unpack and decipher it into a concise regulatory framework.

This is analogous to the task that I faced as a physicist working to understand fundamental physical theories. Specifically, I focused on a basic theory that describes one of the four fundamental forces in nature. This theory goes by the exotic name – quantum chromodynamics – which seeks to explain the forces that hold the nucleus of an atom together. Our understanding of the forces that bind the particles in the nucleus can be expressed in a straightforward manner with an equation that is as simple and elegant as the NRC's mission statement. But just as with the theory of quantum chromodynamics, when it comes to uncovering the practical meaning of the NRC's mission statement and applying it to regulatory policy, the devil is in the details. As with any good theory, it is crucial to understand the physical reality which it seeks to describe.

Before I explain my understanding of the NRC mission statement, I want to describe my recent visit to several nuclear facilities where I obtained practical exposure to the physical infrastructure that is the basis for our nation's nuclear industry. This past week I had the pleasure of traveling with Commissioner Lyons to the Sequoyah and Browns Ferry nuclear facilities. It was not only an informative trip, but it provided us with an opportunity to do what few others are able to do - take a tour of portions of a nuclear facility that are usually inaccessible.

The recovery of Unit 1 at Browns Ferry involves an impressive undertaking with 2,400 personnel performing demolition, reconstruction, and refurbishment activities. Due to the extensive nature of the reconstruction, we were able to physically enter the dry-well. And, with the dry-well head removed, we were able to look down into the reactor vessel. R.G. Jones, the Unit 1 restart manager with more than 30 years of operational experience, was nice enough to show us around. Near the end of our tour he asked if we wanted to see the torus in this boiling water reactor. We agreed enthusiastically.

Of course, when he asked if we wanted to see the torus four flights down, he neglected to remind us that we would have to then walk all the way back up! We worked up an quite appetite just before lunch. But for R.G.'s sake, I'll admit that the exercise was well worth it.

I relay this story, because it demonstrates the importance of understanding the facilities we regulate. You really can not conceive of what a 15 foot diameter pipe looks like until you can see it up close. The chance to see these parts of a reactor was a unique opportunity and certainly provides me with a better understanding and visualization of some of the most unreachable sites of the physical plants and facilities we regulate. This experience allowed me to see in the flesh what I have known and studied in the abstract. It is the place where – through the ingenuity of engineers – the theoretical yields to the practical.

Of course, when we regulate we have to consider *both* the theoretical and the practical. And so I would like to turn to a discussion of what I believe is a triangle of three interconnected guiding principles that provide the direction we need to effectively implement the NRC's mission. The three segments of this triangle are:

1. Instilling a safety and security culture;
2. Transparency;
3. Communication.

These three principles are central to how I conduct myself, how I manage my office, and how I believe the agency functions as an effective, responsive, and efficient regulator.

Safety and Security Culture

Let me begin with a discussion of the first leg of this triangle – instilling a culture of safety and security. Note that I have expanded on the familiar philosophy of “safety culture” to include security. I do not believe that we can continue considering these as independent concepts but should strive for an integrated safety and security culture. There is perhaps no more important element of effective regulation and operation of nuclear facilities than achieving this environment.

One can generally find evidence of a deteriorating safety and security culture at facilities that have experienced problems. As Chairman Diaz discussed in his address to you last year, one of the biggest challenges in this arena is complacency, and unfortunately, complacency is most likely to be recognized only after it seeps in and contributes to a degraded safety and security environment. We must do more to develop the performance measures that identify weaknesses in the safety and security culture and promote strengths in culture before problems emerge.

And there are elements of this work that both the NRC and stakeholders must foster. The licensees should continue to work to recognize the competing cultures at each facility and bring them together around this common goal. The Institute for Nuclear Power Operations has initiatives underway to achieve this goal and I applaud their efforts in this area. The NRC also must foster initiatives that seek to further this culture within our own staff by encouraging programs such as differing professional opinions. And stakeholders must assist in the development of this culture by offering constructive and informed advice and expertise.

The more the NRC, the stakeholders and the licensees operate in a common safety and security culture the more consistent and less intrusive our regulations will be. When it comes down to it, both safety and security rest on the foundation of a unified culture – from the operator who consistently trains and learns, to the NRC inspector who identifies a potential problem, to the security guard who stops a suspicious vehicle.

Transparency

I would now like to address the second guiding principle I believe should infuse our decision-making as a Commission – transparency. I believe that both openness and transparency are important but I draw a distinction between the two.

I see openness as the effort to provide accurate and honest information. This has been a vital focus of the NRC at least as far back as the early 1990s, with Chairman Ivan Selin’s belief that the NRC should increase its “efforts to reach out to the public at large, to recognize how important public credibility is to the achievement of its regulatory goals.” I believe that is just as true today as it was then.

But I also believe that we need to renew our focus on transparency, which I define as ensuring the *processes* we use to make decisions are readily understood. In a post-September 11th world, we can not always fully achieve our goal of openness, but we can always be transparent as an agency – both to the public and to the licensees.

In other words, while specific pieces of information may need to be protected for the NRC to accomplish its public safety and security mission, the *process* the Commission uses to make policy decisions should always be open, accessible, and well understood by all.

The agency has made great strides in the area of transparency, most recently in the process it established to handle nuclear reactor license renewals, but we need to anticipate new challenges that may require creative ways of ensuring we can be faithful to this principle. For example, we should provide staff with the technological tools and support they need to enable other programs to be as transparent as the license renewal effort has been.

Communication

There is a third and final guiding principle I believe is necessary to achieve our mission. Even if we successfully promote a safety and security culture and are transparent about our decision making processes, we must be able to effectively *communicate* these actions. Communication involves its own triangle of three important elements – the public, the industry, and the NRC. You may see a theme developing here...

Effective communication means open channels between each of these entities:

- It means we listen to the public and explain our actions clearly.
- It means we listen to the industry and explain our actions clearly.
- And it means the industry and public must listen to each other and explain their actions clearly as well.

From the NRC's perspective, we have a responsibility to communicate both with licensees and the public. To the licensees we must clearly communicate our processes, intentions, and resource challenges. They deserve this clear communication as we move forward with license renewals, design certifications, and potential applications for new licenses. And to the public we must make the scientific and technical aspects of our work as accessible as we can. The public deserves clear and comprehensible information because they are the entity we serve as clearly defined in our mission statement.

Our agency has also done a lot in this arena. We have published thousands of documents online, developed a good Web site, and held public forums. But we can always do more to explain our efforts in a manner that everyone can easily understand.

In my office I have instituted something I call "The Parent's Law." It goes pretty much like this: We must ensure that we communicate everything we do to achieve our mission in a language my Mom and Dad can easily understand. At the heart of this renowned and well-known law of science is "clarity and simplicity."

I propose that the entire agency should adopt "The Parent's Law". So if any of the NRC staffers in the audience don't have my parent's phone number and need to make sure they are acting in accordance with this law, please see me after the speech.

On a more serious note, I believe that not only does a clear and simple approach increase the public's level of confidence in our activities, it ensures they are more likely to trust us and the important information we provide.

Finally, members of the public – Mom and Dad themselves, if you will – can also contribute to this effort. Citizens all over the country – not just those who are currently involved with the energy sector – should invest time and effort to learn more about the benefits and challenges of nuclear technology. An informed citizenry will be better able to participate in the deliberations as we move forward to the next set of big decisions the NRC and the country will face regarding the direction of our nation's energy sector.

I have spoken today about taking a clear and concise mission statement and considering its practical application in light of three guiding principles. The thing that these principles have in common is that none of them can be easily translated into solving the technological challenges we face in areas such as fire protection or emergency core cooling systems. Yet, the outcomes we achieve in resolving these issues will not be effective without a clear focus on building and reinforcing these principles into our organization.

An example of how I see these interlocking principles affecting policymaking can be found in the discussion of how open the NRC is with information. I believe the NRC should be as open as possible. We have to restrict information when doing so is necessary for security reasons to achieve our mission of protecting the public health and safety. But by achieving a common focus on **safety and security culture** the public will be reassured that these actions are taken to achieve our mission statement. When we find it necessary to do this, the process we use to arrive at this decision should be **transparent**. And finally we should clearly **communicate** to the public and licensees in plain language what we are doing and why.

Conclusion

Which brings us back to the idea of a triangle of the interconnected principles of instilling a safety and security culture, transparency and communication. I think that if we can meet these three goals on any issue we face, we will be effective regulators. After all, any engineer will tell you that the perfect triangle is one of the strongest shapes in structural design.

Therefore, as I begin my job as an NRC Commissioner, I pledge to you to consider the complex policy issues that come before us based on my scientific and public policy background, the guiding principles I have outlined here, and an awareness of the direct impact the decisions I make have in our communities and on our licensees.

I look forward to getting to know you all in the weeks and months ahead and to working collaboratively with you to achieve the goals of our agency and our nation.

Thank you and I would welcome any questions you may have.