



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

May 16, 2012

FOR THE RECORD

**NRC PUBLICLY IMPROVED EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS RULE;
MORE CHANGES TO COME**

A recent article in the media fails to properly describe how the Nuclear Regulatory Commission followed a very open, deliberate path in protecting the public by improving requirements for emergency preparedness (EP) plans and exercises at U.S. nuclear power plants. We'd like to set the record straight.

The NRC, working closely with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), started the process to revise the EP rule after a top-to-bottom review in 2005 noted areas for improvement. The rulemaking also formalized security orders U.S. plants put in place after the events of 9/11.

The NRC discussed the proposed changes at public conferences in 2007 and 2008, and the agency issued draft rule language in early 2008. Additional public meetings on the draft language in 2008 were followed by a proposed rule published in the Federal Register for public comment in May 2009. The NRC took public input on the proposed rule for five months, holding a dozen public meetings and gathering several hundred comments. Staff from the NRC and FEMA [briefed the Commission on Dec. 8, 2009](#), and [May 3, 2011](#), both of which involved a panel of external stakeholders, regarding the proposed rule.

The Commission approved the [final rule](#) on Aug. 30, 2011. Media outlets, including the Associated Press and several television stations, provided coverage of the agency's [press release](#) at that time. The release noted aspects of the rule that the recent media report missed, including new requirements for back-up means of alerting the public and for updating evacuation time estimates when population changes warrant. The NRC held additional public meetings around the country after the rule was published; more than 550 people participated.

The recent media report fails to properly describe one of the new rule's important changes, adding needed uncertainty to emergency exercises. The NRC learned an important lesson in its EP review – plant personnel and state and local officials had become so used to scenarios requiring evacuation that they made decisions long before available information would support their actions. In the real world, that could place the public at risk of accidents on the road even if no evacuation was warranted. The new EP rule fixes that by requiring some scenarios damage a plant without releasing radioactive material – this will force exercise participants to make prudent decisions instead of jumping the gun on evacuation.

Another change poorly described in the recent media report involves a revision to evacuation procedures. Extensive research shows health risks from an accident would be greatest within two miles of a plant, so guidance for the new rule focuses on that close-in population. Getting the “two-mile” people relocated first is more effective than potentially clogging evacuation routes with people further away, and can ensure resources are available for protective actions within 10 miles of the plant. Other research, [announced earlier this year](#), provides additional insight into how successful EP procedures, combined with the slow-developing nature of a reactor accident, can keep the public safe.

One of the EP rule changes requires U.S. nuclear power plants to perform an exercise with a security rather than safety focus on a regular basis. These exercises do not replace the ongoing security-based force-on-force drills the NRC requires at every plant.

The NRC continues to examine EP issues in light of last year’s accident at Fukushima Dai-ichi. The agency has asked U.S. nuclear power plants to analyze their staffing needs for events involving multiple reactors at a given site. The NRC is also in the early stages of rulemaking to integrate and strengthen several categories of nuclear plant emergency procedures. The agency also continues to examine information from Fukushima to see what else can be learned regarding the size of evacuation planning zones and the use of potassium iodide. The NRC will ensure all U.S. nuclear power plants implement the post-Fukushima actions that are warranted.