



UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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Modern Regulation for a New Nuclear Era Chairman Ho Nieh

Nuclear energy is entering a new era. Across the United States and around the world, countries are looking to nuclear power to provide reliable electricity, strengthen energy security, and support economic growth. Advanced reactors and other innovative technologies are creating opportunities that would have been difficult to imagine when many of our current regulations were first developed.

Regulation must keep pace.

That does not mean lowering the bar for safety. It means making sure the regulatory framework is clear, credible, and grounded in the best available science and decades of operating experience.

That principle is at the heart of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's proposed modernization of its radiation protection framework.

Much of the public discussion has focused on one familiar acronym: ALARA, or “as low as reasonably achievable.” Some have interpreted the NRC's proposal to remove ALARA requirements from our regulations as a retreat from radiation protection. That is not what we are doing.

First, the bar for safety is not being lowered.

The NRC's proposed rule does not change the current dose limits for the public or nuclear workers. Those limits continue to provide the fundamental boundaries for radiation protection. What is changing is the regulatory framework for managing doses below those limits.

We are proposing a more objective, graded approach. As potential or actual radiation doses increase, progressively greater protective measures would apply. The framework uses determinate thresholds and established requirements rather than relying on an open-ended expectation that exposure should always be reduced further, regardless of the circumstances.

This distinction matters.

A regulator's responsibility is not simply to set limits. It is also to provide clear expectations about how licensees should operate safely within those limits. Our proposal is designed to do that in a way that is technically defensible, risk-informed, and predictable.

Second, good regulation protects people and enables innovation.

For decades, the nuclear industry has operated under a radiation protection framework that has provided substantial protection to workers and the public. But experience has also shown that subjective regulatory expectations can create uncertainty about what constitutes sufficient protection and when additional measures provide meaningful safety benefit.

Clearer requirements can improve safety because they allow engineers, radiation protection professionals, and operators to understand what the regulator expects and design accordingly.

This is particularly important as we move toward new reactor technologies.

A developer designing an advanced reactor should know what regulatory requirements it must meet. A utility planning a new facility should have confidence that the regulatory standard will be applied consistently. A worker should know that the protections required by the NRC are based on sound technical requirements.

We are raising the standard for regulatory clarity, not lowering the standard for safety.

That is not a slogan. It is the principle guiding this rulemaking.

The NRC's job is to make decisions based on evidence, engineering, science, and operating experience—not on whether a particular regulatory approach has been in place for 50 years.

Third, the new NRC is enabling and accelerating the safe deployment of nuclear.

The United States faces growing demand for reliable electricity. At the same time, our nation must strengthen its energy security and maintain its technological and industrial leadership. Nuclear energy has an important role to play in meeting those needs.

Energy security is national security.

That makes the NRC's role especially important. We must protect public health and safety while enabling the safe and secure use of nuclear technology for the benefit of society. Those responsibilities are not in conflict.

A strong regulator should not be an impediment to responsible nuclear deployment. It should provide the confidence and discipline that make deployment possible.

That means regulations that are rigorous without being unnecessarily complex. It means oversight that is independent without being unpredictable. And it means adapting our framework when science, technology and operating experience demonstrate a better way to achieve our mission.

The NRC's radiation protection proposal is part of that broader modernization effort.

We welcome scrutiny. We welcome technical debate. And we welcome public participation in the rulemaking process. That is how a regulator should operate.

But the conversation should be grounded in what the proposal actually does.

We are not abandoning radiation protection. We are not eliminating dose limits. We are not asking the public or nuclear workers to accept unnecessary risk.

We are building a regulatory framework designed for the nuclear industry of today—and tomorrow.

The United States needs nuclear energy that is safe, secure, and reliable. It also needs a regulator capable of acting with the urgency and credibility that this moment demands.

Our mission remains unchanged: protect the public, protect the environment, maintain security—and enable nuclear technology to serve the nation.

Safety is not an obstacle to nuclear energy. Safety is what makes nuclear energy possible.