

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission



Customer Service Plan

October 24, 2011

Executive Summary

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regulates the civilian nuclear industry’s use of radioactive materials for beneficial civilian purposes while ensuring that people and the environment are protected. The NRC regulates commercial nuclear power plants and other uses of nuclear materials, such as in nuclear medicine, through licensing, inspection, and enforcement of its requirements.

In support of its regulatory mission, the NRC’s most frequent interactions are with licensees, industry groups, other State and Federal government entities, and the public. Some of these groups do not fit the traditional definition of a “customer”. Nevertheless, consistent with the basic intent of Executive Order 13571, “Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service,” dated April 27, 2011, the NRC has undertaken initiatives to streamline its transactions and interactions with key stakeholder groups. The NRC is focusing on the enhancement of licensing operations, critical interactions with licensees, and public access to regulatory documents.

SIGNATURE INITIATIVE: ENABLE ONLINE LICENSING FOR RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL LICENSE APPLICATIONS

Overview: The NRC’s Web-Based Licensing System will provide an online platform for individuals and organizations to apply for a new license, renew a license, or amend an existing license for the use of radioactive materials. It will also provide an opportunity for Agreement States (States that have signed agreements with the NRC authorizing them to regulate certain uses of radioactive materials) to use the same licensing platform. Additionally, the system will provide a current, nationwide repository for official radioactive materials licenses.

Key Customer Groups: Current and potential materials licensees, Agreement States, and other Federal agencies that need NRC and Agreement State data for license verification.

Challenges: Today, the NRC’s materials licensees must submit their license applications through a paper-based process and have no way of tracking the status of the NRC’s license review. License application data must be entered into the licensing system by administrative personnel or contractors before the license reviewers and inspectors can proceed with their work, a process which increases the cycle time for routine applications and sometimes introduces errors. Agreement States have their own system, process, and data requirements, which make it very difficult to provide an authoritative source that Federal and State regulatory agencies can use to verify the validity of a license.

Featured Actions: The NRC is working towards streamlining the current paper-based materials licensing process and making the new system easy for applicants and Agreement States to use.

Timing:

- Throughout: Communicate and coordinate with stakeholders.
- Spring 2012: Provide user training.
- Summer 2012: Provide user help desk support to resolve technical issues.
- Fall 2012: Transition from paper-based system to web-based system.

SERVICE 1: FACILITATE CRIMINAL HISTORY BACKGROUND CHECKS
<p>Overview: As a security measure, all individuals who are to have unescorted access to nuclear power plants or other NRC –licensed facilities must first undergo a criminal history background review. Part of this check involves fingerprint reviews. Electronic files and submittals would help facilitate this process.</p> <p>Key Customer Groups: All NRC licensees.</p> <p>Challenges: The current semi automated process is cumbersome, requiring both electronic and fax submittals, and lacks features important to licensees, such as the ability to track submittal status.</p> <p>Featured Actions: The NRC plans to streamline the way that it accepts and processes fingerprints through its Criminal History application to reduce costs to the agency and improve the process for its licensees.</p>
SERVICE 2: INCREASE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH IMPROVED INFORMATION ACCESS
<p>Overview: Quick Response (QR) codes can be used to enhance the ability of members of the public to quickly and easily access NRC information and websites from their smartphones during public meetings or other events.</p> <p>Key Customer Groups: Members of the public, citizens who live near NRC-licensed nuclear facilities, nuclear plant and industry employees, special interest groups, the media, educators, and Federal, State, and local government employees who use smartphones.</p> <p>Challenges: Current information dissemination methods need updating to enable quick and easy mobile access.</p> <p>Featured Actions: Conduct a QR code pilot project to assess the value of providing external stakeholders using smartphones easy access to agency information.</p>
SERVICE 3: IMPROVE THE ELECTRONIC HEARING DOCKET USER EXPERIENCE
<p>Overview: The NRC must maintain and make available to hearing participants and the general public the official docket files for agency licensing and enforcement adjudications. It is essential that these dockets are complete, accurate, and up to date and that the hearing participants have ready access to docket files. The current electronic system contains more than 58,000 documents that support 46 separate adjudications.</p> <p>Key Customer Groups: Hearing participants such as licensees, license applicants, State and local governments, citizen organizations, and members of the public.</p> <p>Challenges: The current system is dated and limits the users’ ability to create searches and organize search results; many quality assurance checks are needed to verify that records are complete and accurate; and participants are not notified when a new document is filed.</p> <p>Featured Actions: Enhance and update the current electronic hearing docket system to provide information to participants more quickly and easily; streamline NRC operations and system maintenance.</p>
SERVICE 4: IMPROVE PUBLIC DOCUMENT ROOM CUSTOMER SERVICE
<p>Overview: The NRC Public Document Room (PDR) staff helps the public find NRC documents in the agency's extensive electronic, paper, and microfiche collections. The PDR staff also assists the public in using the Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS), an online document and records management repository.</p> <p>Key Customer Groups: Members of the general public, licensees, stakeholders, official visitors to the NRC, and Federal, State, and local government officials.</p> <p>Challenges: The NRC currently lacks a systematic way to find out from customers their desires for improvements to PDR services.</p> <p>Featured Actions: Explore setting up a simple voluntary survey for customers to provide feedback about their PDR experience.</p>

SIGNATURE INITIATIVE
ENABLE ONLINE LICENSING FOR RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL LICENSEES

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Impact and Benefits

- Establish nationwide license verification to reduce the risk of radioactive materials diversion for malevolent purposes.
- Make it easier for materials licensees to submit and track the status of their license applications.
- Provide an opportunity for Agreement States to avoid the costs of developing their own licensing systems.
- Reduce the time spent on routine application processing, reduce errors, and free technical staff to handle substantive regulatory issues.

Key Milestones and Timeline

1. Increase Feedback from Customers

- Attend stakeholder meetings. The NRC participates in the annual meetings for the Organization of Agreement States and the Conference of Radiation Control Program Directors. At these events, the NRC staff meets with the agency's regulatory partners in the Agreement States. (Beginning May 2011 and continuing through implementation—ongoing)
- Involve stakeholders and solicit input in areas of development impacting them. The stakeholders have participated in the validation of the requirements and will contribute to the user interface design review. (August 2011 and forward)
- Establish a Change Control Board with regulator representation for maintenance releases. (Summer 2012)
- Continue the coordination efforts with Agreement States and NRC regional offices after system deployment to solicit feedback. (Beginning Fall 2012—ongoing)

2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Provide user training on the application. (April–June 2012)
- Establish a help desk to address technical issues. (Summer 2012)
- Provide automated tools for data transfer. (Summer 2012)
- Communicate regularly with stakeholders through the NRC.gov website, conference calls, and webinars. (Ongoing)

3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Establish processing times for contractor entry of updates received from Agreement States. (Second quarter 2012)
- Capture the knowledge base of Agreement State data to improve processing time for new and amended license submissions. (Beginning May 2011 through summer 2012)
- Complete quality assurance reviews of information updated by contractor staff. (Beginning Fall 2011—ongoing)
- Publish frequently asked questions and answers on the NRC.gov web site. (Summer 2012)
- Provide help desk contact information across channels. (Summer 2012)

4. Streamline Agency Processes To Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Transition from a paper-based licensing system to an online, electronic process flow. (Fall 2012)
- Improve the licensing process by providing the capability to assign work to license review and inspectors through the Web-Based Licensing System. (Fall 2012)
- Analyze the most common customer inquiries and implement changes (approved by the Change Control Board) to address them. (Beginning fall 2012—ongoing)

SERVICE 1: FACILITATE CRIMINAL HISTORY BACKGROUND CHECKS

Overview: As a security measure, all individuals who are to have unescorted access to nuclear power plants or other NRC –licensed facilities must first undergo a criminal history background review. Part of this check involves fingerprint reviews. Electronic files and submittals would help facilitate this process.

Key Customer Groups: All NRC licensees.

Challenges: The NRC needs to streamline the current semi-automated process, which requires both electronic and fax submittals and lacks modern features such as the ability to track submittal status.

One way that the NRC ensures adequate protection of nuclear facilities is through regulations that require all individuals who are to have unescorted access to these facilities to first undergo a criminal history background review. This review involves Federal Bureau of Investigation evaluation of the prospective employee’s or contractor’s fingerprints to identify and report on the individual’s criminal background. To facilitate this check, the NRC’s Electronic Information Exchange system’s Criminal History application enables licensees to electronically submit fingerprint files to the NRC and the NRC to report back the results. The NRC receives more than 50,000 background check requests annually from its licensees. Timely turnaround of the background check requests is essential to these licensees because delays can cause costly work interruptions. The NRC plans to streamline the way that it accepts and processes fingerprints through its Criminal History application to reduce costs to the agency and improve the process for its licensees. Planned activities are outlined below.

1. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Provide a completely web-based user interface, eliminating the requirement to download a file to the user’s computer. (January 2012)
- Provide an interactive, real-time payment option to enable the submission and payment functions in a single transaction. (January 2012)
- Provide a customer interface that will allow licensees to review, in real time, the status of pending submissions, as well as the history of their submissions. (January 2012)

2. Streamline Agency Processes To Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Reduce the costs of responding to background check requests that arrive by postal mail by modifying the system to provide a response back to the customer electronically, thus saving overnight postage costs (approximately \$6,000 per month). (January 2012)
- Execute a communication strategy to increase the number of licensees using the Criminal History system. Currently, licensees can submit background check information electronically or via postal mail. The more users who submit electronically, the more savings accrue to the Government in both time and money. The electronic process is also more efficient for the licensees. (March 2012)

SERVICE 2: INCREASE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH IMPROVED INFORMATION ACCESS

Overview: Quick Response (QR) codes can be used to enhance the ability of members of the public to quickly and easily access NRC information and websites from their smartphones during public meetings or other events.

Key Customer Groups: Members of the public, citizens who live near NRC-licensed nuclear facilities, nuclear plant and industry employees, special interest groups, the media, educators, and Federal, State, and local government employees who use smartphones.

Challenges: Current information dissemination methods need updating to enable quick and easy mobile access.

The NRC is conducting a QR code pilot project to assess the value of providing external stakeholders using smartphones with easy access to agency information during public meetings, industry conferences, and other events. QR codes are two-dimensional bar codes that can be read or scanned by smartphones with a bar code reader application. These barcodes can be placed on publications, marketing materials, posters, websites, or any medium that provides sufficient contrast to be scanned by the smartphone reader. An individual can use a smartphone with a camera and reader to quickly access content such as a website (via a URL), contact information, a text message, or a video (via a URL). Planned activities are outlined below.

1. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Establish a working group to review proposals for the use of QR codes and establish guidance. (Completed July 2011)
- Use QR codes in Region III public meetings and recruitment material. (July–December 2011)
- Provide informational training to Region III staff on how to read QR codes using smartphone technologies. (Completed August 2011)
- Track usage of QR codes to gauge the range of use and review the effectiveness of the initiative. (July–December 2011)
- Make a recommendation to agency senior management and the Open Government Advisory Group on the use of this technology more broadly by the NRC. (December 2011)
- Evaluate lessons learned and implement standard guidance on the future use of QR codes (January–February 2012).
- Plan and implement QR code use in 2012 public meetings and conference events, such as the Regulatory Information Conference (March–September 2012)

SERVICE 3: IMPROVE THE ELECTRONIC HEARING DOCKET USER EXPERIENCE

Overview: The NRC must maintain and make available to hearing participants and the general public the official docket files for agency licensing and enforcement adjudications. It is essential that these dockets are complete, accurate, and up to date and that the hearing participants have ready access to docket files. The current electronic system contains more than 58,000 documents that support 46 separate adjudications.

Key Customer Groups: Hearing participants such as licensees, license applicants, State and local governments, citizen organizations, and members of the public.

Challenges: The current system is dated and limits the users' ability to create searches and organize search results; many quality assurance checks are needed to verify that records are complete and accurate; and participants are not notified when a new document is filed.

The NRC plans to enhance and update the current electronic hearing docket system to provide information to participants more quickly and easily and to streamline NRC operations and system maintenance. Planned activities are outlined below.

1. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Complete a redesign of the electronic hearing docket user interface to take advantage of new tools that allow users to configure and sort the document collection(s) to suit their individual interests. (January 2012)
- Install a new search capability to allow users to define searches more discretely and save them. (January 2012)
- Improve and streamline navigation from the NRC home page to the electronic hearing docket site. (January 2012)
- Investigate the use of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) capability to notify interested users when new documents have been posted. (June 2012)

2. Streamline Agency Processes To Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Deploy a new publishing tool to reduce publishing errors and eliminate the need for some of the existing quality assurance steps, thereby enhancing the timeliness of publication. (January 2012)
- Improve integration with agency document management system to reduce duplication and costs. (November 2011)

3. Increase Feedback from Customers

- Maintain a Help Desk to assist users and receive user feedback. Consider improvements based on feedback. (November 2011)

SERVICE 4: IMPROVE PUBLIC DOCUMENT ROOM CUSTOMER SERVICE

Overview: The NRC Public Document Room (PDR) staff helps the public find NRC documents in the agency's extensive electronic, paper, and microfiche collections. The PDR staff also assists the public in using the Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS), an online document and records management repository.

Key Customer Groups: Members of the general public, licensees, stakeholders, official visitors to the NRC, and Federal, State, and local government officials.

Challenges: The NRC currently lacks a systematic way to find out from customers their desires for improvements to PDR services.

The NRC plans to set up a simple voluntary survey for customers to provide feedback about their PDR experience and to make changes in response to this information. Planned activities are outlined below.

1. Increase Feedback from Customers

- Develop, design, and implement the voluntary customer feedback survey. (Fall 2011)
- Provide a link to the survey in every e-mail response to customers from PDR staff. (Fall 2011)
- Encourage customers who call the PDR for assistance to complete the survey. (Fall 2011)
- Facilitate self-service for customers by determining whether frequently requested information can be made available on the public NRC website, eliminating the need for PDR staff to act as intermediaries. (Winter 2012)

2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Apply best practices to survey design (e.g., brevity and flexibility). (Fall 2011)
- Use feedback from the survey to allow PDR staff to add or change the focus of questions within the survey over time. (Spring 2012)
- Analyze the customer feedback survey and focus improvement, within resource capabilities, on identified customer needs that are currently either not met or only partially met. (Fall 2011)

3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Provide monthly summaries of survey results to the head of the Technical Information Center Section. (Winter 2012)
- Publish rating percentages and feedback comments from the survey on the public NRC website twice each FY (April/October). (Spring 2012)

4. Streamline Agency Processes To Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Consistently review survey results for customer needs identified as either partially met or not met at all, following up with management and customers to see if further assistance can be provided. (Winter 2012)
- When possible, use survey results to add content to the public NRC website, providing additional self-service for PDR customers. (Spring 2012)