

REMARKS BY
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FOR THE PANEL ON POST TMI-IMPROVEMENTS
25TH ANNIVERSARY TMI-2 ACCIDENT PRESENTATION
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2004

Thank you, Commissioner McGaffigan.

The NRC's communication capabilities are vastly improved since the TMI accident. Utilizing the lessons we learned from TMI, the agency has made a strong and deliberate effort to improve the way that it communicates. Additionally, technological advances in last 25 years have further enhanced this effort.

The federal government as a whole has embarked on initiatives to improve communications during times of crisis. The One Voice initiative is a government-wide effort to coordinate the communications of all federal agencies responding to an emergency so that the federal government speaks in a consistent manner following a radiological event. Both internal and external communication efforts are in part aimed at avoiding the "wide-ranging assurances and unduly optimistic predictions" that brought into question the NRC's credibility during the TMI crisis.¹

As Sam Walker has just explained, many of the communication failures during the TMI crisis resulted from the lack of an effective command and control structure at the NRC. To address these issues, Congress approved a reorganization of the NRC to make it clear that in times of emergency the Chairman is in charge. The other Commissioners are kept fully informed of the crisis as it unfolds, but the Chairman need not consult the other Commissioners when decisions

¹ J. Samuel Walker, *Three Mile Island A Nuclear Crisis in Historical Perspective*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 149.

need to be made on an immediate basis. This has the advantage of allowing for more streamlined and expedited decision-making during a crisis.

As Sam explained, in 1979 the Commissioners were separated from their staff by ten miles and this distance exacerbated the difficulty of communicating during an emergency. Today, the Commission and all of the headquarter's staff are located here in Rockville, Maryland at the White Flint complex. This allows emergency teams to be assembled very quickly to coordinate an emergency response. In the event of an emergency, an Executive Team, typically headed by the Chairman or a Commissioner acting as Chairman, is assembled at the NRC Operations Center, our command center in the event of a crisis. The Chairman is joined by the Executive Director of Operations and other senior managers, technical advisers, communication specialists, and public and congressional affairs liaisons.

The Operations Center has several rooms where teams of experts can analyze the data relevant to the crisis with state of the art technology providing up to date information about the condition of the plant and information about the surrounding community. It has dedicated phone lines to the four NRC Regions and all 103 operating nuclear power plants.

Consequently, communications with the plants, affected States and the public is better coordinated to reduce the possibility of conflicting or confusing information being disseminated. Even as we speak, further technology enhancements are being made to this important facility.

The NRC has developed checklists to ensure that appropriate State and Federal agencies, Congress and the public are informed as soon as possible and channels of communication are developed to ensure timely updates. After the events of September 11, 2001, the NRC greatly

enhanced its ability to effectively communicate with other federal agencies with security functions such as the Department of Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

During the TMI crisis, the NRC staff at headquarters had difficulty communicating with personnel at the plant. That problem has been addressed by installing phones in the control room of each reactor with a dedicated line to the NRC Operations Center. More importantly, NRC Resident Inspectors are now located at every reactor site in the country. That arrangement gives the NRC its own eyes and ears in a crisis to assist the plant personnel addressing the problem. The Resident Inspector programs are managed by the four Regional Offices and during a crisis the Regional Offices, who are closer to the plant and are familiar with the plant and officials in surrounding counties, provide further support to the NRC Operations Center. When conditions warrant, the NRC will immediately dispatch a team of experts from the Regional Office, including the Regional Administrator, to join the resident inspectors at the site. When that team arrives, authority to respond to the event is transferred (including communications) from the headquarters Operations Center to the Regional Administrator. This allows communications to be handled by an on-site team and furthers the NRC's ability to monitor conditions at the plant and improve communications with headquarters, the affected States and the public.

The Chairman talked about Emergency Planning and Preparedness roles and functions. Communications capabilities are tested during regular Emergency exercises. These exercises include testing physical notification systems, such as sirens, phone and radio transmission devices and the roles and responsibilities of individuals in charge of making the notifications.

When communication problems are experienced they are quickly corrected. Consequently, the NRC remains assured of the effectiveness of the communications systems and those who operate them. Also, the decision-making capabilities, flow of information to and from the plant and communications with the States are tested. Unlike the situation that existed before TMI, all of the Commissioners and members of our senior staff participate in at least one major training exercise every year.

Technology is continuing to change, especially in the area of wireless communication. These advancements will continue to improve the NRC's and the plant's ability to communicate in a crisis. To prepare for Y2K, satellite phones were installed at each plant. After 9/11, classified phones were installed in each resident's office. Technological advances in modeling plume dose dispersion allow us to more effectively determine and communicate risks to State and local communities.

There have also been efforts to address communication issues important to ensuring the day to day safe operation of the plants. The very same valve malfunction that led to the TMI plant crisis had been experienced at another plant, but the information about the issue was not shared throughout the industry. Consequently, TMI operators having no information about a previous valve malfunction made incorrect assumptions. Today, the Staff uses bulletins, guidance documents, letters and other less formal face-to-face interactions to share staff and industry insights. While we are not perfect in this regard, we are continuing to make efforts to enhance our effectiveness.

If I could leave you with one message, it would be that the NRC communication capabilities are significantly better than they were in 1979 and they are continuing to improve. Communications is vital to public confidence and ensuring that we can carry out our regulatory mission to protect public health and safety. We will continue to routinely test and seek to improve our communications capabilities.

Before turning the program over to our Executive Director for Operations, Bill Travers, I want to join Chairman Diaz and Commissioner McGaffigan on congratulating Sam Walker for writing a terrific book. It is vital that we learn from the experiences of the past. Sam's good work will help ensure that the important lessons from TMI will not be forgotten. Now it is my pleasure to turn the discussion over to Bill Travers, who will discuss some of his personal observations and insights.