



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, DC 20555-001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>

No. S-00-09

March 30, 2000

**REMARKS BY
RICHARD A. MESERVE, CHAIRMAN
U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
AT THE
Y2K RECOGNITION CEREMONY
2:00 P.M. WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2000
NRC AUDITORIUM**

Good afternoon. I am delighted to participate with you in this special ceremony recognizing the many NRC employees who contributed to the agency's effort to ensure a safe Year 2000 transition in the nuclear industry. Joining me this afternoon are my fellow Commissioners Greta Dicus, Nils Diaz, Edward McGaffigan, and Jeffrey Merrifield. I also want to extend the Commission's appreciation to John Koskinen, Chairman of the President's Council on the Year 2000 Conversion, for taking the time to participate in our ceremony today.

On the morning of January 1, 2000, the Nation and the world breathed a collective sigh of relief as the new century dawned without incident around the globe. The "millennium bug", with a few minor exceptions, failed to make its expected appearance. The century rollover was so uneventful, in fact, that some members of the general public expressed disappointment and seemed to believe that the Y2K problem had been greatly exaggerated and that the Government's response was a massive and expensive overreaction.

To those of you who spent the early morning hours of January 1 manning the NRC Operation Centers in headquarters and the regions, or who were on alert at nuclear power plants and other licensed facilities, the perspective was quite different. For you and others like you in sister Federal agencies and in the private sector, the failure of the Y2K bug to appear was attributable neither to luck nor to happenstance, but was rather the result of years of effort, careful planning, and close cooperation with the private sector, other agencies, the President's Council and the White House Information Coordination Center, and the international community. The Y2K effort represented one of Government's finest hours and a striking example of what can be accomplished when various organizations work together to achieve common goals.

The NRC was an important partner in addressing the unprecedented planning and management challenge posed by the Y2K rollover. As early as 1996, the NRC began working with nuclear power

plant licensees to ensure that their plant systems would be Y2K ready. Licensees were requested to inform the NRC of the steps they were taking to ensure Y2K readiness based on an industry-wide plan endorsed by the NRC and the Nuclear Energy Institute. After evaluating the responses received, NRC conducted on-site audits of selected nuclear power plants and later expanded the Y2K reviews to all nuclear plants.

In a parallel effort, the NRC staff also worked with materials licensees and fuel cycle facilities to ensure that Y2K problems would not affect the safety of workers, patients, the public, or the environment. In view of the large number and various types of materials licensees, the staff decided to conduct interviews of a representative cross-section of licensees to determine the possible effects of Y2K, kept licensees informed of possible Y2K problems as they were identified, and encouraged licensees to develop contingency plans.

By September 1998, the agency had sufficient confidence that power plant safety systems would function properly and that materials licensees were appropriately implementing Y2K readiness plans. The focus of attention turned to contingency planning. NRC formed a task force that would ensure the protection of public health and safety and the environment in the event an unforeseen Y2K problem should occur. In July 1999 the staff tested the plan in a tabletop exercise in which my colleague Greta Dicus participated, and in October conducted a full scale test of the plan.

All of this intense activity was coordinated with other agencies and the White House Information Coordination Center. In addition, nearly every nation with a nuclear power plant shared information on the Y2K problem with each other through the NRC-developed and Internet-based Y2K early warning system or YEWS. Although involvement in YEWS was voluntary, approximately 37 countries did participate. Indeed, the reaction to YEWS was so positive that it may provide the foundation for more permanent systems for information exchange.

Nearly all of this activity occurred before I was appointed Chairman. Although I became familiar with the plans and expectations for the Y2K rollover in the months of November and December, I was not quite sure what to expect when I arrived at the NRC operations center on the evening of December 31 to participate in the overnight Y2K vigil. It was during the course of that evening, as only a very few incidents were reported, that I fully appreciated the extent of the effort that the NRC staff had put into the Y2K problem and how extraordinarily effective each of you were in carrying out your individual responsibilities.

In the end, the “millennium bug” proved to be, as the Chinese are fond of saying, a “paper tiger.” But this was only because of the extraordinary efforts and teamwork that you and your Y2K partners everywhere exhibited since the project began in 1996. The Commission therefore takes great pride today in recognizing the NRC headquarters and regional employees who contributed their time and talent to the resolution of this potentially critical national and international problem.

Now I want to introduce our special guest - Mr. John Koskinen, Chairman of the President’s Council on the Year 2000 Conversion. Many of you will recognize him from his numerous appearances on television, particularly during the weeks surrounding the Y2K rollover. John provided the overall leadership and direction that enabled the Nation and the world to enter the 21st century with no significant Y2K-related problems.

Although John may not recall this, he and I have met before. My former law firm customarily has a Monday lunch that features an outside speaker. John arrived to make a presentation, and I met him in the firm's reception area. Unfortunately, John had arrived to give his speech a few weeks too early. Thank goodness he has proved far more able in protecting the world's calendar than his own.

Please welcome Mr. John Koskinen.