



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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“A Day in the Life”

Prepared Remarks for

**The Honorable Gregory B. Jaczko
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission**

at the

**2009 North American Young Generation in Nuclear (NA-YGN) Annual Workshop
Washington, DC**

May 17, 2009

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you at this year’s Annual Workshop. What I had planned to talk to you about was a typical day in the life of a Commissioner. I think I will still do some of that, but with a dash of what it is like to be Chairman thrown in. Both jobs are interesting and exciting.

How many of you have found this to be the case - no matter where you go, as soon as you mention what you do, you find that everyone seems to have an opinion about the nuclear field? Whether coming home from the airport, going to the doctor, visiting friends and family – everyone you meet seems to be interested in nuclear and have an opinion about it. That makes it an exciting field in which to work.

As one of four Commissioners, I get to focus on nuclear safety and security policy issues. For someone with a physics background who has always enjoyed the intersection of science and public policy, dealing with those big picture issues is fascinating for me. I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to work for Members of Congress on the both sides of Capitol Hill and to serve in the executive branch. I thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to contribute to the effort to make government work better for the American people.

On a less lofty level, I enjoy the field trips too. Let me explain. Resolving issues associated with fire protection at nuclear power plants is important and has been one of the priorities I have focused on at the NRC. But it can seem like a rather dry subject: the proper interpretation and implementation of decades-old technical regulations, activities like reviewing SECY papers to determine the best regulatory process to improve licensee compliance with 50.48(c) of the CFR, considering the use of enforcement discretion and voluntary compliance, determining when an exemption is justified and allowable, and considering other complicated regulatory processes.

But there is another side to this work – the hands on science and technical aspect. For example, Mark Salley from our Research organization always tries to liven the topic up when we get together to discuss it. To make it more real, he will bring me samples of burned and charred electrical cables so that I can better visualize what could happen during a fire. I have also traveled to a National Institute of Standards and Technology lab to see burn tests. They have the ability to light different materials on fire and study how they burn and it is fascinating to see the characteristics of a fire. After witnessing one of these tests, I finally fully understood the direction we all got as children to crawl under the smoke because a sharp horizontal line develops between the two phases of a fire with most of the heat and smoke trapped above it and clearer air below.

While our Research office's show and tell and the field trips are always fascinating, what I truly enjoy the most about my job are the people I get to work with at the NRC. As Chairman, I am now fortunate to have the opportunity to interact even more closely with a remarkably dedicated and talented agency staff – and that includes the large number of new people who have joined the NRC over the last four years. The number of employees we have on board has increased by more than twenty-five percent during that period and almost half of our workforce has been at the agency for five years or less. In the New Reactors office alone, for example, almost sixty percent of the staff is new to the agency.

What that means in concrete terms is that most of our staff joined the agency after September 11, 2001. Most did not experience Davis Besse in 2002, let alone Three Mile Island in 1979, as regulators. These changing demographics give us exciting opportunities to teach a new generation of skilled people how to be effective safety regulators and also to take advantage of the ability these new employees have to look at issues from a new perspective to make us an even better agency.

And it is a critical time for the NRC to get that right. In addition to overseeing the 104 operating nuclear power plants and thousands of radioactive materials licensees across the country, we have also received 17 applications to build 26 new reactors over the last couple of years. Reviewing the safety of the new reactor designs involves numerous fields, such as materials science, engineering, seismology, hydrology, thermodynamics, electronics, project management and law. As a nation we need to continue to inspire people to enter these important fields, whether they seek employment in private industry, government agencies, or nonprofit organizations.

For the generation that many of you fall in, sometimes called “Gen Y” or the “Net Generation,” the digital age has been with you all your life and incorporating digital technology into those scientific disciplines probably comes very naturally to you. For new reactors, and even existing reactors, there are many opportunities to find solutions to the challenges we face using new technologies and you will be at the forefront of that effort.

So what does all this mean for those of you in this audience? I believe you have a bright future with fun new challenges to tackle ahead of you. With that opportunity also comes responsibility. I would ask that when it comes to nuclear safety, never be complacent. To ensure the use of nuclear materials is safe and secure, always base your decisions on a foundation of sound science and policy, coupled with a questioning attitude and diversity of thought.

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today and share a little about the NRC. I wish you well in your careers and look forward to answering any questions you have.