



# NRC NEWS

**U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**

Office of Public Affairs Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

E-mail: [opa.resource@nrc.gov](mailto:opa.resource@nrc.gov)

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

---

No. S-09-26

## **“A Regulator’s Perspective on New Nuclear Reactor License Applications”**

**Prepared Remarks for**

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

**at the**

**The Howard Baker Forum  
Washington, DC**

**September 24, 2009**

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today, during the first in a series of roundtables examining U.S.-Japan cooperation in different energy sectors. Before I begin my remarks, I would like to note that a number of the new design certifications and combined license applications before the NRC were submitted by, or are heavily supported by, Japanese corporations, such as Hitachi through GE-Hitachi Nuclear Energy, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd., and Toshiba Corporation.

I think it is important to keep in mind that at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, we are safety and security regulators. We do not have a role in deciding how many new nuclear reactors may potentially be built in the United States. Our focus is ensuring public health and safety in the use of nuclear materials. Ensuring that the NRC maintains its focus on safety and security, and continues to be viewed as a firm regulator with the confidence of the public, is important.

As applicants pursue new nuclear power plant licenses, the NRC will also remain focused on the safety and security of the 104 operating nuclear units in the United States. To ensure that it does not lose its focus on the safety of operating fleet, the Commission created the Office of New Reactors or NRO, separate from the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation or NRR. This enables NRR to continue to focus solely on the safety of operating reactors, and NRO to focus on

the review of new reactors. The NRC is well prepared today to deal with the work of licensing, and potentially regulating a new fleet of reactors.

Over the past few decades, the NRC has developed a solid foundation for the licensing and oversight of nuclear facilities through the development and issuance of regulations and guidance documents, and legal proceedings. In addition, the NRC expanded its regulatory framework to provide an alternative means for the consideration of new reactors licenses.

In the past, nuclear power plants were licensed under a two-step licensing process. This process required both a construction permit and an operating license. In 1989, the NRC established an alternative licensing process that essentially combines a construction permit and an operating license, with certain conditions, into a single license. Under either process, before an applicant can build and operate a nuclear power plant, it must obtain approval from the NRC.

The NRC currently has before it 17 applications to build 26 new reactors. These applications command a significant level of our resources, as well as significant public interest. We are proceeding to process them pursuant to our regulations and guidance documents.

Providing regulatory oversight for nuclear reactors, or reviewing the safety of the new reactor designs, involves numerous fields, such as materials science, engineering, seismology, hydrology, thermodynamics, electronics, project management, and law. Each nation that pursues nuclear energy needs to inspire and encourage people to enter these important fields, whether they seek employment in private industry, government agencies, or nonprofit organizations.

Many of the companies designing and building components for nuclear reactors are multinational companies. Nuclear regulation is now a global enterprise, and we learn from sharing information with other nations and by receiving operating experience and information on emerging issues from reactors in other countries.

The NRC is a strong supporter of international cooperation. The NRC is involved in many bilateral and multilateral efforts to exchange information and best practices. We work in close cooperation with international bodies such as the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The NRC has roughly 38 government-to-government arrangements.

One notable international cooperative effort in which the NRC is active is the Multinational Design Evaluation Program, or MDEP. MDEP is a very useful effort to enhance nuclear safety globally, through sharing information about the designs and technical evaluations of new reactors. MDEP is succeeding because each regulatory authority is becoming better informed; more focused on safety; and stronger in its independent decision making

The NRC has a long history of cooperation with government and non-government organizations in Japan. Specifically with Japan, the NRC has had International Arrangements since 1997. The NRC and its international counterparts exchange information relating to the regulation of safety, safeguards, physical protection, waste management, and environmental

impact of designated nuclear facilities and to nuclear safety research programs on an equal and reciprocal basis

Also, we have 17 formal research agreements with government and non-government organizations in Japan. These research agreements cover areas such as aging of reactor components, seismic safety, and advanced reactor designs. Over the past year, NRC has conducted 2 vendor inspections in Japan in conjunction with our Japanese counterparts. Next week we will carry out a third inspection of a Japanese facility, again with our Japanese counterpart.

In summary, the NRC will stay focused on the safety and security of the operating fleet, and will continue to provide clear guidance and expectations for the review of new reactors. We will look to applicants to provide complete and high quality applications and responses to questions for NRC review. Let me close by reiterating my belief that the NRC is built upon a solid foundation of a talented workforce dedicated to the safety and security mission of the agency, and guided by sound safety regulations. This solid foundation is strengthened by public involvement and input, and by our being open and transparent about what we do and why. I am confident that we can successfully meet these challenges in an effective way, with safety at the heart of our decisions.