



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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**OPENING STATEMENT OF
NRC COMMISSIONER WILLIAM C. OSTENDORFF
PUBLIC MEETING ON THE EVENTS IN JAPAN
MARCH 21, 2011**

Good morning. This is a vitally important meeting for the Commission and the country.

First, I want to extend my deepest sympathies to the people of Japan. The consequences and loss of life from the earthquake and tsunami are simply devastating. I am fully mindful of the valiant efforts of the workers and first responders at the Fukushima site who have directly faced the challenges of this tragic event. Our thoughts and prayers are with all.

Let me also commend and thank the Chairman, the EDO, and the NRC staff for their efforts to date in supporting the NRC's monitoring and assistance associated with events in Japan. I appreciate the hard work going on 24/7 at the NRC Operations Center since March 11. I have been impressed with the technical competence and professionalism demonstrated by the NRC staff.

I am also grateful for the highly competent team of NRC experts dispatched to assist our Japanese friends. While dismayed by the tragedy, at the same time as a Commissioner I am extraordinarily proud of the commitment of the NRC team to proactively provide assistance to Japan.

The events that have unfolded at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant over the last 10 days are stark and have caused me to deeply reflect on my responsibilities as a regulator of the US nuclear industry. On one hand, I believe that our existing licensing and oversight activities assure us that the 104 commercial nuclear power plants in this country are safe. On the other hand, I know that we must (and most certainly will) conduct a thoughtful and rationale examination of the NRC's regulatory framework with the information and lessons learned resulting from the incidents in Japan. I do not think the NRC can wait until every lesson learned is identified before starting this important work. Rather, I believe it is appropriate for the NRC to conduct a timely and focused review of our regulatory framework in the key areas relevant to what we know-and will come to know as lessons emerge- about what happened at the Fukushima site. [While we will hear shortly from the NRC staff on this topic, I believe that topics such as

beyond design basis events and severe accident mitigation are potential areas that might receive focused attention].

I was also encouraged that the US nuclear industry has taken some proactive steps to verify and walk down capabilities at their sites. It will be important that the NRC remains engaged with the industry on the follow up activities related to this unprecedented event in Japan.

As we head down this path, I know that we all must be mindful of the challenges ahead. As stated by the Chairman several times in recent days, we need to conduct a thoughtful and systematic review. And, we need to do this in a way that clearly and effectively communicates to the American people what this event means for the safety of commercial nuclear power plants in the United States.

Thank you.