POLICY ISSUE
(Information)

April 3, 2012   SECY-12-0050

FOR: The Commissioners

FROM: R. W. Borchardt
                Executive Director for Operations

SUBJECT: STATUS OF THE U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION'S
                RESPONSE TO THE OPEN GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVE

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this paper is to inform the Commission of the status of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC's) Open Government Plan, dated April 7, 2010, and to provide an addendum to the plan that will be published by April 9, 2012.

SUMMARY:

This paper transmits the first biennial addendum (enclosed) to the agency's original Open Government Plan (Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) Accession No. ML100980489) that the NRC staff published in response to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Directive M-10-06, dated December 8, 2009. In accordance with current OMB guidance, the staff will publish the addendum on the NRC's Open Government webpage by April 9, 2012. This paper reports on the agency's progress in meeting the commitments outlined in its original plan. Major goals for the next two years are presented in the addendum.

BACKGROUND:

On March 10, 2010, the Commission was informed through SECY-10-0025, "Status of NRC's Response to the Open Government Directive," of staff action taken in response to OMB's Open Government Directive, issued in December 2009. The directive addressed action in three distinct areas: (1) publishing Government information online, (2) improving the quality

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of Government information, and (3) creating and institutionalizing a culture of open government. In the directive, each agency was asked to develop an Open Government Plan to serve as a public roadmap detailing how the agency would incorporate open government principles into its core mission objectives. The NRC published its Open Government Plan on April 7, 2010, (revised June 7, 2010). The OMB Directive also called for each agency to update its plan every two years. Current OMB guidance notes that the updated plan should include two new initiatives to be completed within calendar year (CY) 2012 and two more within CY 2013. Furthermore, one of the initiatives should be a new flagship initiative.

DISCUSSION:

The NRC's Open Government Plan has served the agency well as a roadmap for guiding its Open Government program. In line with the directive, the plan addresses how the NRC will improve transparency and further integrate public participation and collaboration into its activities. The plan also focuses on identifying and publishing information online in open formats to promote additional analyses. The directive also calls upon agencies to develop a flagship initiative to further advance openness. While the agency already has built a strong foundation of openness policies and practices that guide its regulatory activities, during the last two years the agency has taken advantage of new technologies to take these practices to the next level.

We are pleased that the NRC was able to meet or exceed each goal it established in its Open Government Plan. The following discussions on transparency, participation, collaboration, and flagship initiatives highlight the NRC's accomplishments to date and identify goals for our Open Government program over the next two years.

Transparency

Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about the NRC's activities. More specifically, public stakeholders must have timely access to clear and understandable information on the NRC's role, processes, activities, and decision making.

The NRC's initial Open Government Plan discussed existing practices the NRC uses to conduct its regulatory responsibilities in an open and transparent manner to keep the public informed of its regulatory, licensing, and oversight activities. The plan described what the NRC already is doing to promote transparency in its operations, including (1) its policies, management controls, and performance measures, (2) its key information dissemination channels, and (3) its participation in Federal transparency initiatives. The plan also provided an action plan for improving transparency through the publication of high-value datasets, policy changes, expansion of web streaming, use of new tools for public communication, and improvements to the ADAMS and the NRC public website.

In 2010, the NRC launched its Open Government website, which significantly improved the NRC public website's facility locator feature and search capabilities, and exceeded dataset publication goals. In 2011, the agency exceeded its dataset publication goals again and launched a significantly redesigned public website. Since the redesign, the new site's scores on content, look-and-feel, and transparency have continued to improve.

Commenting on the NRC's website, a January 2012, article in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* noted the following:

> *…the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) website is a gold mine of information. It has comprehensive collections of documents, organized by topic area as well as by facility location. Searches generate results that include titles and descriptions of the documents available. And in December, the NRC announced enhancements — be still my heart! — that include a more powerful and versatile search engine and the ability for users to save searches as web links for streamlined access to frequently used documents. The NRC even has a free service that automatically notifies subscribers about new documents on selected topics.*

Looking forward, the NRC will continue to focus on transparency through a Plain Writing Initiative and by identifying opportunities to improve the customer experience for users of the Public Document Room. We will also maintain the collection of high-value data already published and publish additional high-value data, in open formats, as opportunities arise.

In addition, the staff plans to use the Open Government Plan to update the Commission on its progress in meeting the high-profile communication elements contained in SRM-S12-0010, "Engagement of Stakeholders Regarding the Events in Japan."

Participation

Participation encourages and enables members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise so that the NRC can make regulatory decisions with the benefit of information from a wide range of stakeholders. These stakeholders must have meaningful opportunities to participate in the NRC's regulatory processes.

The NRC's initial Open Government Plan discussed how the agency encourages and provides for participation through public meetings, hearings, conferences, symposia, and workshops. At www.nrc.gov, the public can learn about public meetings, comment on proposed rules and draft documents, learn how to petition the agency to take an enforcement action, participate in hearings, or ask the NRC to consider changing or establishing a regulation. As with transparency, an action plan was developed to explore the use of new media and tools for enhancing public participation.

In 2010, the agency used web technology to promote meeting participation, introduce subscription-based information services, and put in place the infrastructure for social media. In 2011, we launched three social media initiatives: the NRC Blog in January, Twitter in August, and YouTube in September. Our blog quickly became a valuable communications channel for events in Japan and for providing information about earthquake and flooding events affecting nuclear facilities in the United States. For example, while daily blog views normally average just under 500 per day, after the event in Japan this number spiked to more than 5,700 views in a single day.

The NRC will continue to focus on growing opportunities for stakeholder participation through a continued focus on social media, use of virtual meetings, and increased visibility of rulemaking and other NRC documents open for comment.

Collaboration

Collaboration improves Government effectiveness by encouraging partnerships and cooperation across Federal, State, local, and Tribal governments and with international regulatory authorities.

The NRC's initial Open Government Plan discussed the extensive network of regulatory, State, and Tribal governments, international organizations, and nonprofit and private entities with which the NRC partners. The plan noted that the agency would review key existing internal and external collaborative activities to assess how collaboration with its partners could be further improved.

Many of the accomplishments cited in our discussion of participation also contributed to furthering our collaboration programs. Examples include the introduction of social media technologies and our increased use of virtual meetings, which made it easier to collaborate with our regulatory partners. In particular, in January 2011, the NRC enabled staff access to LinkedIn for professional networking with colleagues outside the agency.

Looking forward, the NRC will continue to focus on growing opportunities for collaboration through social media and web conferencing technologies within industry and Government workgroups as we did in 2010 and 2011. An area of particular interest is the opportunity for further collaboration with Agreement States through the introduction of web-based licensing.

Flagship Initiative

The OMB Directive noted that each agency should introduce a flagship initiative as cited below.

> Each agency's Open Government Plan should describe at least one specific, new transparency, participation, or collaboration initiative that your agency is implementing (or that will be implemented before the next update of the Open Government Plan).

Current OMB guidance notes that a new flagship initiative should be part of the agency's updated plans.

A key element of the NRC's initial flagship initiative, "Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement," was to strengthen the NRC's engagement and communication channels with the public and agency stakeholders by using web 2.0 technologies. These technologies included social networking, citizen engagement, media streaming, and virtual meeting tools. These same technologies also were used to increase the visibility and effectiveness of the NRC's public website, which was redesigned to better address the informational needs of site visitors, improve their site experience, and foster greater public engagement.

"Mobile NRC," our next generation flagship initiative, will strengthen the ability of the agency's stakeholders who use smart phones or other mobile devices to engage with the NRC and better understand its regulatory mission. By providing more ready access to regulatory information, both NRC stakeholders and staff will benefit.

The NRC will incorporate mobile-friendly web pages into its public website. We'll use quick response codes on NRC publications and at media events to make it easier for members of the public to access information by scanning a barcode from their mobile phones and tablets. In addition, the agency will assess its public applications to determine if mobile capabilities should be incorporated to improve the user experience, enhance public participation and, where appropriate, strengthen collaboration in NRC regulatory activities.

RESOURCES:

NRC offices already are addressing actions required to advance the NRC's initiatives under the Open Government Directive. Some of these actions can be implemented with existing agency resources. Resources for additional planned actions, such as increased use of web-based technologies to transform NRC interactions with stakeholders and the public, will be addressed using the NRC's planning, budgeting, and performance management process.

COORDINATION:

The Office of the General Counsel has reviewed this paper and has no legal objection. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this Commission paper for resource implications and has no objections.

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Enclosure:
Open Government Plan Addendum

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