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NRC Chairman Urges African Nations to Develop Strong, Independent Regulators When Pursuing Nuclear Power Development

Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Allison M. Macfarlane today urged government and nuclear industry officials from African nations to develop independent, effective regulatory agencies as a prerequisite for the safe use of nuclear power.

Macfarlane addressed the Nuclear Industry Congress Africa 2014 in Cape Town, South Africa. She stressed that the benefits of developing new sources of electricity – including a more reliable power grid, increased food safety and economic development – would be more difficult to achieve without effective regulation.

"To protect public health and safety, and ensure that the country derives maximum benefit from the technology, every country with a nuclear power program must have an independent, effective regulator," Macfarlane said, adding that the regulatory agency should be in place before important decisions are made on design and location of reactors.

"A nuclear regulator must be independent, but simply being separated from promotional activities on an organization chart isn't enough," Macfarlane said. "The regulator must be adequately funded and staffed with highly competent subject matter experts. It must have the authority to stop an activity if it identifies a safety concern, even if it means that a project is delayed. It must be able to shut down a plant that's not operating safely, even if it means a population is temporarily deprived of electricity."

The full text of Chairman Macfarlane's speech is available on the NRC website.

While in South Africa, Macfarlane will meet with South African nuclear regulators, as well as officials from other African nations, and tour the Koeberg nuclear power plant. She will also meet with U.S. Ambassador Patrick H. Gaspard.