

Strategies to Enhance Communication with Stakeholders in the Decommissioning Program of the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission

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ABSTRACT

The United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) communicates decommissioning-related information to stakeholders through various means, and is continuously striving to improve in this area. This paper discusses some of the improvements that the NRC staff has recently instituted to enhance communication with stakeholders, as well as other ongoing efforts to ensure decommissioning-related information is transmitted to stakeholders in a clear and transparent manner.

INTRODUCTION

The NRC has used several means to communicate technical and regulatory information in the decommissioning arena to stakeholders. These include: (1) the Annual Report on the Status of the Decommissioning Program, (2) NRC's public web site, which provides separate web links to decommissioning activities for reactor and materials facilities, and (3) site-specific communication plans. The Annual Report on the Status of the Decommissioning Program is a publicly available document that provides information about the different decommissioning sites under NRC's jurisdiction, including the technical and regulatory issues at each facility, and estimated dates when the sites will be released from NRC oversight. The "Annual Report" also discusses the accomplishments in the decommissioning program during the past fiscal year (FY) and the challenges that the NRC staff will address in the coming FYs. This document is published as a NUREG document. NRC's public web site provides detailed information to members of the public and stakeholders on the different complex decommissioning facilities that NRC regulates, the decommissioning guidance and regulations, the key aspects of the NRC decommissioning process, and other relevant information that is of general interest to people that are engaged in decommissioning activities. NRC's decommissioning project managers use site-specific communication plans, which are intended to guide communications among the project managers, licensees, state officials, and other stakeholders that could be potentially affected by decommissioning activities at a specific facility. NRC staff has evaluated the decommissioning program and identified communications with stakeholders as an area that could be improved.

DISCUSSION

In 2003, the NRC staff completed an evaluation of its decommissioning program and several improvement areas were identified. These areas were combined with other ongoing improvement efforts and documented in the NRC's Integrated Decommissioning Improvement

Plan (IDIP). One of these areas is the way NRC communicates decommissioning-related information to stakeholders. Currently, the NRC staff is implementing several enhancement aspects to implement its communication strategy. IDIP identified four (4) products to improve communication: (1) enhancements to the Annual Report on the Status of the Decommissioning Program, (2) improvements to the decommissioning web page in the NRC's public web site, (3) development of a decommissioning brochure for members of the public and stakeholders, and (4) conducting periodic stakeholder workshops.

The NRC staff has reorganized and expanded the Annual Report on the Status of the Decommissioning Program to provide comprehensive and clear site-specific and programmatic information. The "Annual Report" will be published as a NUREG document in the even years, and will be published as a shortened report in the odd years. Reference [1] is the "Annual Report" published in 2004. Reference [2] is the shortened report published in 2005. The shortened report provides a comprehensive summary of the NRC's decommissioning program and serves as a reference document that summarizes decommissioning activities at complex material sites, commercial reactors, research and test reactors, uranium mill tailings facilities, and fuel cycle facilities. The shortened report also discusses accomplishments in the decommissioning program since the previous NUREG document issued in 2004.

The NRC staff has enhanced the decommissioning web page to make it more user-friendly for licensees and stakeholders that want to learn more about NRC's decommissioning activities. Reference [3] provides the web address for the NRC's decommissioning web page. The NRC staff has provided integrated information related to decommissioning activities at complex material sites, commercial reactors, research and test reactors, uranium mill tailings facilities, and fuel cycle facilities. Some of the information topics on the web page include: (1) location of decommissioning sites under NRC's jurisdiction, (2) financial assurance for decommissioning facilities, (3) international aspects of decommissioning, and (4) decommissioning lessons learned. On this last item, the NRC staff is working with industry groups and Agreement States to develop means for the information to be captured and disseminated to the decommissioning community in a user-friendly manner in order to improve decommissioning of future sites. The web page also provides web links to other topics related to decommissioning activities, such as: low-level and high-level waste disposal, spent fuel storage and transportation, and key documents that support or describe the decommissioning program. Another improvement to the decommissioning web page is the ability for members of the public to provide questions or comments to NRC staff. These enhancements will assist members of the public and stakeholders in obtaining information related to NRC's decommissioning program.

Additionally, the NRC staff published in September 2005 a decommissioning brochure. Reference [4] provides the web address for the brochure. The decommissioning brochure succinctly provides decommissioning information and is a quick reference for stakeholders who want to learn more about the NRC's decommissioning program. It describes the decommissioning process, the type of facilities regulated by the NRC, and how members of the public can participate in the decommissioning process. The brochure features a map which shows the location of NRC's decommissioning facilities. This map is intended to provide the reader with a visual idea of the wide range of facilities that NRC oversees. The brochure includes a chart that compares the NRC's dose requirement for unrestricted use of

decommissioned facilities against doses received by humans from typical routine activities. The chart is intended to put NRC's dose criterion in perspective to facilitate understanding of how restrictive the requirement is.

Lastly, the NRC conducted a two-day stakeholder workshop in April 2005. During this activity, NRC staff sought feedback on several decommissioning regulatory topics. Licensees and other stakeholders participated in these discussions and shared their views on the topics. On the first day of the workshop, NRC staff discussed issues from the License Termination Rule Analysis. Some of the topics during this first session included: restricted use and institutional controls, realistic scenarios, financial assurance, and intentional mixing of contaminated soil. The second day of the workshop was focused on decommissioning lessons learned. During the morning session, a panel consisting of representatives from the NRC, nuclear industry, and Agreement States shared their experiences and views on what lessons have been learned over the last couple of years. The afternoon session consisted of a facilitated discussion with members of the audience who gave their comments on the panel presentations, and provided additional feedback on decommissioning lessons learned. Reference [5] provides the web link to the summary of this workshop. The NRC intends this to be the first of future periodic meetings with stakeholders to exchange ideas and information as part of the process of continuous improvement in the NRC's decommissioning program.

CONCLUSIONS

The NRC is continuously striving to improve its communications with stakeholders about the decommissioning program. Four products have been developed and implemented to enhance the way the Agency communicates decommissioning-related information and issues to members of the public and other stakeholders. These products, as well as ongoing efforts among the NRC, industry groups, and Agreement States, are part of the efforts to achieve continuous improvement in NRC's communication of decommissioning information.

REFERENCES

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