

Regulatory Impact Summary

Scope and Objectives

On December 20, 1991, the Commission issued a staff requirements memorandum directing the staff of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to develop a process for obtaining continual feedback from licensees and to report the feedback on the process to the Commission each year. The staff described the continual feedback process in SECY-92-286, "Staff's Progress on Implementing Activities Described in SECY-91-172, "Regulatory Impact Survey Report—Final," issued August 18, 1992.

The feedback process requires regional management to solicit informal feedback from its licensees during routine visits to reactor sites. The managers record this feedback and forward the feedback forms to the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR) and the Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response (NSIR). The regions, NRR, and NSIR then evaluate the concerns identified and take any necessary corrective actions. This process, which was implemented in October 1992, has given licensees frequent opportunities to comment on regulatory impact.

This enclosure reports on feedback received from licensees during the previous fiscal year. During this period, the staff received feedback from 70 reactor licensees regarding 146 issues. The comments fell into two main categories—inspector performance and formal communication with licensees. Of the comments received, 92 percent were favorable and 8 percent were unfavorable. The following sections summarize the feedback received, the staff's evaluation, and the proposed improvement actions.

(1) Inspector Performance

Feedback

Almost half of the licensees' comments concerned inspector performance. This category covers a wide range of inspector practices but excludes issues involving communication with licensees, which is discussed in the next section. About 90 percent of the comments praised the NRC's inspection staff while noting the high quality of inspections and the effective working relationship between the NRC and its licensees.

Licensees viewed most inspections including team inspections as professional and of high quality. Most licensees stated that NRC inspections were effective and correctly characterized the licensee's performance. However, two licensees raised concerns about the force-on-force inspection process, and one licensee expressed concern about the B.5.b Phase 2 and 3 inspection effort.

Evaluation and Action

The staff concludes that inspectors were professional and maintained effective working relationships with the exception of isolated incidents. About 90 percent of the comments received this year were favorable. In general, the staff reviewed the negative feedback for trends and found that it related only to isolated incidents. However, the staff made enhancements to the force-on-force inspection procedure and processes as a result of the regulatory impact process and other feedback to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

The NRC management continues to emphasize to the staff the importance of professional conduct. Senior NRC managers reinforce these expectations in inspector counterpart meetings, workshops, and training courses and during site visits conducted in accordance with Inspection Manual Chapter 0102, "Oversight and Objectivity of Inspectors and Examiners at Reactor Facilities." The staff will continue to closely monitor inspector performance.

(2) Formal Communication with Licensees

Feedback

About half of the licensees' comments concerned the effectiveness of communication between the NRC staff and licensees, and over 90 percent of these comments were favorable. Almost all comments were favorable with regard to communications with inspectors and regional management.

Many licensees said that communication was good or excellent, and others noted that the staff's communication skills have improved. A few licensees reported communication problems related to the clarity of inspection issues, including differences in the assessment of an issue as discussed during the inspection, as presented at the exit meeting, or as documented in the inspection report.

Evaluation and Action

The staff concludes that the communication between the NRC and its licensees is effective and that the reported communication problems were isolated instances. The staff bases this conclusion on the large number of routine interactions between the NRC and its licensees combined with the many favorable comments and the relatively few comments received during the past year.

The staff is aware of the importance of prompt and accurate communication and emphasizes this goal in the policy, guidance, and training provided for the inspection program. Effective communications will remain a challenge and will receive continued monitoring and attention from regional and headquarters management.