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August 31, 1999

MEMORANDUM TO: Janice Dunn-Lee, Director  
Office of International Programs

FROM: Frank J. Congel, Director /s/  
Incident Response Operations

SUBJECT: IRO STAFF RESPONSE TO COMNJ-99-004  
COOPERATION WITH MEXICO

Please incorporate the attached IRO staff response to issues 1 and 3 of the Staff Requirements Memorandum COMNJD-99-004, Cooperation with Mexico into your Office response. OIP has been identified as lead office for this effort. If modifications are required, please contact me at 415-7476 or Eric Weinstein of my staff at 415-7559.

Attachment: As stated

cc: D. Perez, IP

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**INCIDENT RESPONSE OPERATIONS (IRO) INPUT TO ISSUES 1 AND 3,  
COMNJD-99-004 - COOPERATION WITH MEXICO**

- 1) Establish reliable communication links between Commission Nacional de Seguridad Nuclear y Salvaguardias (CNSSN) and the NRC Emergency Operations Center.

**Staff response:**

The staff has explored communication options between the NRC Operations Center and Mexico. MCI/Worldcom, an FTS 2001 contractor, offers International Dedicated Digital Data Service (IDDDS). This dedicated line would avoid problems associated with network congestion and would cost about \$6K for set-up and about \$24K/yr for use.

Satellite telecommunications units can also be used to provide linkage between the NRC and CNSSN. Currently, Iridium and Inmarsat offer satellite service in Mexico. Based on NRC experience, it is estimated that installation of a fixed satellite unit at CNSSN would cost about \$20K-25K. Annual costs would be dependent upon usage but are expected to be less than the \$24K/yr cost of the IDDDS. Satellite communications have the added advantage of being more likely to survive natural events such as earthquakes and hurricanes.

Further discussions between Mexican authorities and the NRC staff are necessary to establish communication needs and funding options.

- 3) Request staff's recommendations for development and implementation of an emergency evaluation exercise at Laguna Verde, with the involvement of Region II Regional Administrator Luis Reyes.

**Staff response:**

The staff recommends an initial meeting with Mexican authorities to discuss emergency preparedness (EP) exercise types and scopes currently practiced in the U.S. and Mexico. If both parties agree, staff presentations based on the Incident Response Operations (IRO) State Outreach Program would be used to assist members of both countries in designing an effective EP exercise for Laguna Verde that would meet the needs and desires of Mexico.

Based on NRC staff experience, an exercise for Laguna Verde should be developed in two phases. The first phase would be to plan and construct a "tabletop exercise" which would allow participants to develop reactor accident scenarios, conduct training, and establish objectives just as with full scale exercises. NRC has substantial experience in planning and conducting tabletops and has published NUREG-1514, "Guidance for a Large Tabletop Exercise for a Nuclear Power Plant." The staff could provide direct guidance and assistance to Mexico in planning and conducting its initial tabletop.

Attachment

*[Handwritten signature]*

Upon successful completion of a tabletop, the Mexican authorities would be ready to begin the second phase of planning a full scale EP exercise. NRC staff members who provided guidance and assistance in developing the tabletop would be offered to assist in the large scale endeavor.

One or two NRC staff members traveling to Mexico for about three 1-week trips each should provide sufficient assistance to the Mexican authorities for developing and conducting the tabletop. Following the tabletop, planning and conducting a full scale exercise may require an additional 0.5 FTE of NRC staff support. In addition, NRC staff could assist the Mexicans in obtaining technical, and possibly, financial support through an existing IAEA program.

NRC staff support would include the involvement of Luis Reyes, Regional Administrator, Region II.

- \* NUREG-1514 states, "A tabletop, as described here, is a structured discussion, which is based on a scenario or set of conditions for potential emergency response situations, among decision makers or responders in a low-stress environment. Tabletops are not intended to solve all problems or make policy; they may simply identify areas which need resolution. They are a teaching/training aid as well as an opportunity to talk through plans and procedures or discuss new systems. Their objective is both educational and developmental in that disconnects, perceptions, and procedures can be identified easily and then corrected."