

August 21, 2003

Dr. Mario V. Bonaca, Chairman
Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

SUBJECT: SAFETY CULTURE

Dear Dr. Bonaca:

This is in response to your July 16, 2003, letter to Chairman Diaz presenting the Committee's (ACRS) understanding, conclusions, and recommendations on the agency's regulatory role related to safety culture. The ACRS concluded that the existing regulations provide an appropriate framework for monitoring the impact of licensee safety culture on performance, and recommended that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) periodically self-assess its safety climate.

In accordance with the Commission's March 26, 2003, staff requirements memorandum (SRM) on SECY-02-0166, "Policy Options and Recommendations for Revising NRC's Process for Handling Discrimination Issues," the staff is monitoring "developments abroad so as to ensure that the Commission remains informed about these efforts and their effectiveness." We are also monitoring efforts (e.g., by IAEA and INPO) to develop objective measures that would serve as indicators of possible problems with an organization's safety culture. In addition, we are monitoring international and domestic events in which safety culture plays a role. Such knowledge will serve as an important cross-check for the staff in confirming the appropriateness of the existing regulatory framework.

One of the major mechanisms staff uses to periodically assess its safety culture are the results of the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) survey of NRC's safety culture and climate which is performed every three years. The most recent OIG safety culture and climate survey results were published on December 11, 2002. I established a Safety Culture and Climate Task Group to carry out the Chairman's directive to conduct a systematic assessment of the key areas identified in the OIG report and develop an action plan. The Task Group issued its report on June 13, 2003. The Task Group developed four major recommendations. It also identified best practices that may be useful to individual offices and managers. The staff is presently

considering different approaches for implementing the recommendations. In addition, several individual offices and regions have begun to assess their own safety culture through surveys and focus groups.

The staff will keep the ACRS informed as agency safety culture activities evolve.

Sincerely,

/RA/

William D. Travers
Executive Director
for Operations

cc: Chairman Diaz
Commissioner McGaffigan
Commissioner Merrifield
SECY

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