

**Plain Writing Act
Compliance Annual Report
April 2021**

Dissemination

- In response to the *Plain Writing Act of 2010* [the Act], an action memorandum from the Executive Director for Operations (EDO) instructed all managers to familiarize themselves with the requirements of the Act, and to encourage staff to take appropriate training.
- Staff is reminded to use plain language through periodic articles in the agency's in-house newsletter, the *NRC Reporter*.
- The Commission has also directed staff to make greater use of plain language when engaging with the public, especially on topics of significant interest.
- The EDO issued a communication standard, follow-up guidance, and checklists to direct and assist staff on improving the quality of documents. Additionally, several training courses have been implemented, which focus on introducing and reinforcing the basic concepts of plain writing and clear communication.

Action Plan

- The NRC identified the following documents that should be the focus of plain writing: Performance Assessments, Generic Communications, Inspection Reports, and Significant Enforcement Actions. These are stored in the agency's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System database and are accessible through the NRC's public Web site and the Public Document Room in Rockville, MD. In cases where a document is technically complex, employees are instructed to provide a plain language cover memo or abstract.
- Most documents prepared by the NRC staff are reviewed by technical editors who review them for a variety of things including appropriate use of plain language. The technical editors (and NRC staff preparing documents) are expected to follow NUREG-1379, Rev. 2, "NRC Editorial Style Guide," which includes a chapter entitled "Plain Language."

The current EDO, appointed to her position in July 2018, identified enhancing the quality of communications as one of her key focus areas. Today, the EDO continues to focus on enhancing communication, in all its forms, throughout the agency, by encouraging staff and office-led efforts that promote consistent, clear, and comprehensive messaging. It is her belief that our written products are a key part of our decision-making process and, therefore, they are critically important in accomplishing the NRC's mission. Plainly written, concise, and well-organized written products foster fully informed decisions, convey better context on the subject to stakeholders and the public, and NRC's commitment to openness and transparency, and help to ensure that our regulatory decisions are clearly communicated and better understood. It also underscores the EDO's viewpoint that communications are instrumental in building and maintaining an environment in which safety, security, preparedness, technical excellence,

teamwork, creativity, and continuous improvement are essential to successfully fulfilling its important safety and security mission.

NRC remains focused on taking steps to measurably increase the quality of its internal and external communications by clarifying expectations for written products and sharing examples of effective written communications. In the last year, the Office of the Executive Director for Operations (OEDO) updated agencywide guidance on communication tools and plans. Specifically, in the last year OEDO updated OEDO Procedure 0215, "Communications Plan," which provides revised guidance on developing a communications plan, and employing the most effective communications tools for the intended audience, in accordance with plain language guidelines. Also, OEDO staff developed a SharePoint site to provide additional information such as examples, frequently asked questions, and plain language pointers to further assist staff.

The NRC staff continues to develop and refine existing templates for routine correspondence including letters from the Chairman, memoranda, NRC letters, and Commission papers. These templates are easy-to-use tools that help enhance uniformity and quality of written documents across the agency and provide an appropriate level of information on key topics. For example, the NRC staff finalized and implemented the template for a *Briefing On A Sheet*, which is used to provide high-level, key information to agency senior management. Additionally, the NRC staff refined the one-pager template to further enhance the consistency in how briefing materials are developed to support the EDO and Commission for congressional hearings. Both of these templates are intended to assist staff in providing clear and concise information on various topics of interest, with the appropriate level of detail, to support agency senior management for interactions with external stakeholders.

Individual offices and staff members play an active role in supporting agencywide efforts to improve written products. For example, staff developed peer to peer training focused on improving writing quality, consistency, and application of plain language requirements. Additionally, NRC editors and other individuals from across the agency, who are known for their strong writing skills, provide training and advice to staff on how to draft public products, including, press releases, public presentations, and social media postings.

Website

Consistent with the Act's requirements, the NRC created a section on our public Web site, under the broader topic of Open Government, that outlines our Plain Writing Action Plan and offers general guidance on plain writing at the NRC. All annual reports are posted there.

Training

The NRC offers multiple training courses to teach elements of plain writing and clear communication. All staff members are encouraged to take the basic courses. Employees who write documents read by the public are encouraged to pursue more extensive training options. Available courses include:

- Abbreviating, Capitalizing, and Using Numbers
- Audience and Purpose in Business Writing
- Clarity and Conciseness in Business Writing
- Creating Well-Constructed Sentences
- Communicating Effectively with Customers
- Editing and Proofreading Business Documents
- Effective Writing for Acquisitions
- Getting the Details Right: Spelling Basics
- Improving Your Technical Writing Skills
- Plain Language
- Proofreading: Applying the NRC “Editorial Style Guide”
- The Plain Writing Act
- Troublesome Words and Phrases: Common Mistakes in Writing
- Using Punctuation Marks

In fiscal year 2020, these courses were completed a total of 296 times.

Stakeholder Feedback

The NRC has a long-standing commitment to openness and transparency. Since the passage of the Act, the agency has implemented subscription-based services on the NRC public Web site to enable stakeholders to keep abreast of current agency news and activities. The NRC has enhanced stakeholder involvement in public meetings by revising the agency’s public statement on public meetings, which in part, encourages staff to employ innovative ways to interact with the public, including using varied meeting formats to maximize opportunities for public participation and engagement and expanding the use of Web event and virtual meeting technologies. Furthermore, staff continues to use interactive forums to promote stakeholder engagement and awareness, including social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. The NRC Office of Public Affairs also continues to enhance readability of communication products for the public, when appropriate, by applying the Flesch Grade Level Readability Formula.