



# Nuclear Energy Information Service

*Illinois' Nuclear Power Watchdog since 1981*

Office and Mail: 3411 W. Diversey Avenue, #16, Chicago, IL 60647-1245  
(773)342-7650      www.neis.org      neis@neis.org

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## **PRESS STATEMENT ON THE NRC REPORT ON THE FUKUSHIMA NUCLEAR DISASTER July 13, 2011 David A. Kraft, Director**

Complying with the order from President Obama to review the safety of America's 104 operating nuclear reactors and their spent fuel pools, the NRC today finally released its findings of the preliminary lessons learned from the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station.

We are pleased that the Agency kept its word and conducted the review. At the same time we are both heartened and dismayed at their findings.

Heartened, because much of what they found and recommend is **exactly** what many in the safe-energy and environmental community have been telling them for decades. Seek, and ye shall find – finally.

Dismayed, because it took what may become a \$200 billion disaster just to get their attention to “find” these problems which they have voluntarily chosen to ignore previously:

- California's Alliance for Nuclear Accountability has been fighting NRC indifference to earthquake concerns for years, both at reactors and radioactive waste storage areas;
- Nuclear Information and Resource Service and Union of Concerned Scientists and have been warning for years that U.S. reactors are prone to multi-mode catastrophes, which NRC disregarded; and incessant problems with and inadequacies of backup power at U.S. reactors;
- Beyond Nuclear of Takoma Park has for years warned about the inherent design flaws of the 23 old GE Mark-I boiling water reactor containments and spent-fuel pools in use in the U.S., now amply demonstrated in real life by the explosions, fires and complete meltdowns of three of these reactors at Fukushima;
- NRC continues to dismiss or ignore even in the current review decades of pleadings and stacks of evidence from safe-energy organizations for improvements in emergency response preparation, more effective hardened onsite storage of spent-nuclear fuel at reactors, and serious threats to reactors and spent fuel pools from terrorists and airline crashes – hazards already-demonstrated by real-world occurrences – ignoring the age-old adage that, “Whatever has already happened must therefore be possible!”
- Knowing full well that three (3) top to bottom analyses of U.S. nuclear power operation and regulation were in the works, NRC failed to voluntarily halt its rubber-stamping of 20-year reactor license extensions based on existing standards -- which might be subject to radical changes stemming from these reviews.

One thing is rock-bottom certain – America cannot afford this level of “watchfulness.”

To be sure – many more lessons are yet to be learned from Fukushima. This disaster is a “work in progress,” not expected to be concluded for as many as 10 years, according to Japanese officials. That said, there are lessons to be learned, and more importantly, **actions to be immediately taken** to prevent any future Fukushimas from occurring. NRC’s mere recommendations will no longer suffice; corrective actions are required.

What is glaringly absent from the Report (although not really expected) was the pledge that the NRC itself will begin to **assertively regulate** the nuclear industry. Not advise; not recommend; not instruct; not oversee. But – REGULATE according to more rigid levels of compliance with the (arguably questionable) existing standards.

Some obvious and immediate regulatory changes are needed. But, to protect the U.S. from its own version of Fukushima, we do not necessarily need any more regulations (the noun); what we need is more **regulation** – the **action verb**. Historically, NRC has diluted the former, and abnegated the latter. This Agency culture must change – and fast.

For example, since the Reagan Administration, the Agency has operated using not merely the “carrot” approach with the nuclear industry, but the “milk, honey, and coddle” approach. This attitude of “industry, heal thyself” under the NRC’s watchful eyes pushed the people of the Midwest to within a year of their own nuclear disaster due to the current 1000-year flood surrounding Nebraska’s Fort Calhoun nuclear power station – now rechristened “Port” Calhoun since its voluntary water barrier failed, and flood waters lap at the water-tight doors of the reactor building. Had NRC not evolved a backbone and used a “stick” approach a year ago, and forced Fort Calhoun’s reluctant owners to make needed flood preparations, much of the Mississippi River Valley would today be dealing with its own version of Fukushima.

Carrots are fine – if they work. Fukushima, Fort Calhoun, the incessant tritium leaks, GE-Mark-I containments and absurdly positioned spent-fuel pools all scream that the NRC moving forward is going to have to use “the stick.” A really BIG stick, if it is to guarantee the safety of the U.S. from catastrophic nuclear disasters such as Fukushima and Chernobyl.

If the industry balks at compliance, it cannot be allowed to threaten the public health, environment and the economy with its continue operation. If the NRC refuses to regulate, it should be disbanded, and its vital and necessary regulatory functions given to those who will actually do the job needed.

--Dave Kraft, Director—  
July 13, 2011