

PRESS RELEASE

NRC Chairman Macfarlane and Others talk about New Nuclear Safety Regulations

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On Wednesday, US and Japanese authorities on nuclear energy spoke to the US-Japan Roundtable about the process of formulating new safety regulations. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Chairman Allison Macfarlane updated members of the U.S.-Japan Roundtable on the NRC's post-Fukushima efforts to improve nuclear safety and its collaboration with the new regulatory agency of Japan.

Dr. Macfarlane briefed the audience about the ongoing and close partnership between the NRC and the Japan Nuclear Regulation Authority (JNRA). In December 2012, the NRC enacted a bilateral agreement with JNRA, which resulted in "a dialogue with regular communication between the staffs." Macfarlane emphasized that "an effective regulator is independent, well-funded and staffed, free of undue influence, and open and transparent." As Japan looks to finalize new safety standards by July 18, Macfarlane acknowledged that, as is the case in the US, those regulations will continue to be improved over time.

Macfarlane described the NRC as "we work closely with industry and openly with the public." The NRC prioritized its post-Fukushima response recommendations into three "tiers": Tier 1 concerns, such as preparing for beyond design events, are already being addressed, and now they are working on Tier 2 and 3. The triple disasters in Japan caused the NRC to rethink the likelihood of some hazards, such as multi-unit accidents. As a result, US plants are developing FLEX response strategies that account for station blackouts and broken infrastructure. One of the NRC's post-Fukushima measures, Macfarlane explained, demands for the rulemaking process on filtering strategies "will involve a significant amount of public communication and engagement."

Chairman Macfarlane's speech was her first to the U.S.-Japan Roundtable, which regularly hosts NRC Chairmen and Commissioners. During his tenure, former NRC Chairman Gregory Jaczko spoke on three occasions, and Commissioner William Ostendorff addressed the members at the Roundtable's December 2012 Conference "American Viewpoints on Japan's Zero Nuclear Option."

Prior to Chairman Macfarlane's remarks, Mr. Hirobumi Kayama, Director of the Office for International Nuclear Energy Cooperation in Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, provided an update on nuclear energy policy and regulation in Japan. His cross industry overview touched on the present situation of nuclear energy uses such as reprocessing and the fuel cycle, the effect of the energy mix on Japan's economy and the new administration's energy policies. He asserted that LNG and oil cannot substitute for nuclear as a baseload energy. It is a matter of time before utilities will be forced to use coal-fired plants again.