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***** FOR THE RECORD *****

NRC Makes Fire Safety a Priority

The NRC wishes to set the record straight regarding its fire protection requirements.

Every U.S. nuclear power plant complies with the relevant NRC requirements for protecting its reactor from fire hazards. They are routinely inspected under the NRC's Reactor Oversight Process, and when problems are identified, licensees are directed to fix them in a timely manner based on their safety significance.

NRC regulations allow two approaches to fire protection. The first, adopted in 1980, is a *prescriptive* program that mandates specific measures to ensure that a reactor will survive a fire. This was a "one size fits all" approach imposed on plants that were not uniform in their design or construction. When certain requirements in the "one size fits all" approach are not practical for a plant, the NRC may grant an exemption. The plant owners must justify these exemptions with solid technical data, and the NRC grants exemptions only when we are convinced that fire safety will be maintained. Exemptions do not mean a plant is out of compliance.

The second approach, adopted in 2004, uses *risk-informed, performance-based* methods approved by the National Fire Protection Association Standard 805 (NFPA 805). This approach utilizes quantitative and qualitative risk insights to focus attention and resources on specific areas of a facility where fire hazards might be greater. A total of 45 reactors have committed to transition to NFPA 805. Plant operators have spent millions of dollars on analyses and facility improvements in part because the NRC has provided an incentive to discover and correct their own vulnerabilities.

Some vulnerabilities may not be resolved until the transition to NFPA 805 is completed. The NRC may exercise enforcement discretion to allow the plant operator time to fix the problem only when compensatory measures are in place to ensure the plant remains safe in the meantime.

A recent Union of Concerned Scientists report, "Lack of NRC Enforcement of Fire Regulations for Nuclear Reactors," has criticized the NRC's efforts to protect the nation's commercial nuclear power reactors from the threat of fire. While we respect UCS's concerns, we must emphasize that the NRC takes fire protection seriously. NRC regulations and oversight help ensure U.S. nuclear power plants can safely shut down in case of a fire. Ongoing inspections and approaches such as NFPA 805 will enhance the plants' fire protection capabilities.