

## Plain Writing Act Compliance Annual Report April 2022

### 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*, and other newsletters targeted to specific staff members such as *The Administrative Exchange*.
- 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 U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (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 Style Guide is being revised and will better align NRC style with Federal Plain Language Guidelines.

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. 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.

The 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. The Office of the Executive Director for Operations updated agencywide guidance on communication tools and plans and developed a SharePoint site to provide additional information such as examples, frequently asked questions, and plain language pointers to further assist staff. The Office of the General Counsel developed a

template database for *Federal Register Notices* to ensure that NRC staff prepare notices that meet *Plain Writing Act* and other statutory requirements. Additionally, the NRC launched agencywide use of a proofreading tool that is embedded in word processing software that, among other things, enforces NRC-specific style rules. The NRC staff are encouraged to use these tools and to identify opportunities for improvement.

Individual offices and staff members play an active role in supporting agencywide efforts to improve written products. For example, in summer 2021, staff created and hosted a virtual panel discussion on writing quality and writing for different audiences. More than 180 staff participated in that event. A recording is available for agency staff to watch and reference. Further, staff created an online Writing “Community of Practice” where staff can engage with each other on topics of interest related to writing, seeking support with writing challenges, and sharing resources. Additionally, the 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.

### **Web site**

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. Options include a variety of on-demand and instructor-led courses such as:

- 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
- Getting the Details Right: Spelling Basics
- Improving Your Technical Writing Skills
- Proofreading: Applying the NRC “Editorial Style Guide”
- The Plain Writing Act
- Troublesome Words and Phrases: Common Mistakes in Writing
- Using Punctuation Marks
- Using the Parts of Speech

In fiscal year 2021, staff and managers completed these courses a total of 88 times.

Notably in 2021, staff developed and executed a highly successful training course, “Writing: Back to Basics.” The course materials were developed specifically for the NRC writers by staff subject matter experts. The curriculum uses real NRC documents and examples to refresh and increase knowledge of subject-verb agreement, clauses, parallel construction, active voice versus passive voice, paragraph structure, and plain writing. The course includes presenter-led modules and hands-on drafting, writing, and editing exercises. Since the first class offering in

May 2021, more than 150 staff and managers from across the agency have participated. Classes are offered quarterly with a limit of 25 participants, and all classes through the end of calendar year 2022 are full and waitlisted. The instructors are currently scheduling classes for 2023 to keep pace with the popularity.

### **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.