

Plain Writing Act Compliance Annual Report April 2024

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 that 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 website and the Public Document Room in Rockville, Maryland. 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 the NRC staff preparing documents) are expected to follow NUREG-1379, Rev. 3, "NRC Editorial Style Guide," which includes a chapter entitled "Plain Language." The Style Guide has been revised to better align the NRC's plain writing guidance with Federal Plain Language Guidelines.

The NRC is focused on enhancing its information on public websites and social media and is committed to using stakeholder feedback to update, improve, and increase the communication tools and processes used to reach and engage with the public. Plainly written, concise, and well-organized products foster fully informed decisions, clearly convey the subject to stakeholders and the public, while also demonstrating NRC's commitment to openness and transparency. These efforts are intentional and aim to ensure that our regulatory decisions are clearly communicated and better understood.

In July 2023, the Providing Accountability Through Transparency Act of 2023 was signed into law requiring federal agencies to include a plain language summary of 100 words or fewer on all notices of proposed rules and to post such notices online. Since passage of the law, the NRC has provided a brief plain language summary on regulations.gov for all NRC proposed rules.

The NRC is committed to using plain language across multiple channels and forums of communication. In 2024, the agency implemented a communication strategy titled “COM7.” This methodology focuses on the seven Cs of effective communication in senior leadership’s communication with staff, resulting in increased efficiency and effectiveness, enhanced transparency, and improved trust. The NRC anticipates that COM7 will improve both our internal communications with staff and our external communications with the public.

Website

Consistent with the Act’s requirements, the NRC created a section on our public website 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 on the website (<https://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/open/plain-writing/nrc-plan-rpts-news.html#plan>).

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
- Writing: Back to Basics

In 2024, the NRC continues to offer its highly successful training course, “Writing: Back to Basics.” The course materials have been developed specifically for NRC writers by staff subject matter experts within the Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards’ Rulemaking Center of Expertise. 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 its inception, more than 250 staff and managers from across the agency have participated in the course. This popular training course is offered several times a year.

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’s public website

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, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook. The Office of Public Affairs continues to apply the Flesch Grade Level Readability Formula to its written products, especially social media content, to enhance the public's understanding of the NRC's activities, mission, and programs.