UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

CHAIRMAN

July 23, 2012

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Markey:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of June 4, 2012, urging an independent review of the agency's safety culture in light of recent issues raised in recent letters about NRC employees and their efforts to ensure the agency is making proper safety decisions.

On June 7, 2012, former Chairman Jaczko directed the staff to develop a comprehensive, agencywide plan to help NRC further improve its culture of encouraging staff to voice and consider a variety of views pertinent to the agency's safety responsibilities. He outlined his expectations for what this plan should address, including a recommendation for an independent, outside source to engage employees regarding this effort.

I received the staff's plan on July 11. The plan has two key components and efforts outlined in the plan will be overseen by the NRC's Agency Culture Advisory Group (ACAG). The first main component relies on a current effort to conduct an agencywide assessment of our safety culture and the environment for raising concerns covering all segments of the NRC workforce. Staff plans to use the upcoming Office of the Inspector General (OIG) triennial Safety Culture and Climate Survey (SCCS) as the vehicle, and conduct analyses of the results separate from those that will be performed by the OIG. The OIG SCCS itself is conducted by an independent outside source, Towers Watson.

Later this summer when the OIG survey is finalized, staff will determine whether the proposed survey questions will effectively assess specific areas of interest associated with the NRC's safety culture. If the OIG survey is unable to accommodate the NRC's interest in this regard, options will be developed by the ACAG to conduct the assessment through other means. At this time, OIG survey results are expected to be available in November 2012, after which the ACAG review and analyses will be performed. These analyses are expected to identify areas for improvement that lend themselves to agencywide solutions, as well as areas that can be improved within individual components of the NRC. The ACAG will develop action plans to address organization-specific improvement areas.

The second main component of the plan is continuation of ongoing implementation activities associated with strengthening the agency's environment for raising concerns, safety culture, and organizational culture, such as the Differing Professional Opinion Program. The plan also identifies a number of additional activities that may be undertaken to improve the agency's organizational and safety culture, e.g., enhanced training programs.

Additionally, the plan includes wide-ranging communications, both internally and externally, to share information on activities being undertaken, as well as survey results and associated follow-up activities.

I look forward to being able to share the results of this effort with you. If you have questions in the meantime, please call me or Ms. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

Allison M. Macfarlane