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U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Safety Culture Oversight

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Synopsis

The NRC recognizes that it is important for all organizations performing or overseeing regulated activities to establish and maintain a positive safety culture commensurate with the safety and security significance of their activities and the nature and complexity of their organizations and functions. The NRC's approach to safety culture is based on the premise that licensees bear the primary responsibility for safety. The NRC provides oversight of safety culture through expectations detailed in policy statements, safety culture assessor training for NRC inspectors, the oversight process, and the Allegations and Enforcement Programs.

The NRC's Safety Culture Policy Statement (SCPS) sets forth the Commission's expectation that individuals and organizations establish and maintain a positive safety culture commensurate with the safety and security significance of their activities and the nature and complexity of their organizations and functions. The SCPS is not a regulation. It applies to all licensees, certificate holders, permit holders, authorization holders, holders of quality assurance program approvals, vendors and suppliers of safety-related components, and applicants for a license, certificate, permit, authorization, or quality assurance program approval, subject to NRC authority.

The NRC provides training to inspectors to become qualified as Safety Culture Assessors for general safety culture assessments or Inspection Procedures (IP) 95003 inspections. This qualification requires a firm understanding of both safety culture and inspection skills, and is an essential part of the NRC's oversight of safety culture.

The Reactor Oversight Process (ROP) is the NRC's program for assessing the performance of operating commercial nuclear power reactors. In 2004, the NRC took steps within the ROP to strengthen the agency's ability to detect potential safety culture weaknesses during inspections and performance assessments. In 2006, guidance and procedures for inspecting and assessing aspects of licensees' safety culture were included in the ROP. In 2014, revisions were made to the ROP based on the common language initiative. The ROP uses inputs from performance indicators and inspection findings to develop conclusions about a licensee's safety performance. Performance is evaluated systematically and on a continuous basis through planned inspections, and mid-year and end of year assessment meetings. The Construction Oversight Process (CROP) for new reactors, and the Fuel Cycles Oversight Process (FCOP) were modelled after the ROP.

In addition to the oversight processes, the NRC's Allegation and Enforcement Programs address safety culture through the use of Chilling Effect Letters (CEL) and Confirmatory Orders (CO). CELs are issued when the NRC has concluded that the work environment is "chilled,"(i.e., workers perceive that the licensee is suppressing or discouraging the raising of safety concerns or is not addressing such concerns when they are raised). The number and nature of allegations received at the NRC, including allegations related to discrimination for raising safety related concerns help inform the NRC's decision to send a CEL. COs are issued by the NRC to document agreements on specific corrective actions made by the licensee in response to inspection findings.

Country or International Agency

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