

Press Release

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**SCHAKOWSKY QUESTIONS WHETHER FEDERAL NUCLEAR OVERSIGHT STANDARDS ARE SUFFICIENT**

**Says Exelon incidents in Illinois, over 4,000 industry violations since 2000 raise questions about adequacy of safety procedures**

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, a member of the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, today delivered the following statement at a hearing on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Reactor Oversight Process. Since the Reactor Oversight Process was implemented in 2000, the nuclear industry has been cited over 4,000 times for safety violations, and Illinois has been subject to several leaks of radioactive tritium and the nation's first on site-nuclear emergency in a decade at the LaSalle facility.

Rep. Schakowsky's statement is below:

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today's hearing on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Reactor Oversight Process. A number of recent incidents at nuclear plants in Illinois and throughout the nation have put in doubt whether the NRC's safety standards and inspection processes are adequate. I look forward to discussing whether the NRC has learned from incidents like Davis-Besse and restructured its oversight process sufficiently to prevent their recurrence.

Since President Bush has proposed new nuclear development as a signature part of his energy policy, we must ensure that the NRC's safety procedures are foolproof and that they deter future incidents. Since the Reactor Oversight Process was implemented in 2000, safety inspections found that plants or employees had failed to comply with safe operating procedures in over 4,000 instances. And while many of those incidents were classified as "green," under this system, green doesn't mean all clear - it means that a plant or an employee failed to meet

the NRC's safety standards. I look forward to discussing whether that number is an improvement over the number of incidents that occurred before the ROP was in place, and whether the ROP has promoted a culture of safety and accountability at our nation's nuclear plants.

In Illinois, which has 11 nuclear reactors, several incidents at Exelon plants have demonstrated that even after the implementation of the ROP, there have been a number of safety hazards and radioactive leaks that have threatened public health. This February, Exelon disclosed to the public that between 1996 - 2003, two Illinois plants spilled radioactive, cancer causing tritium on four occasions. Not only did this expose holes in oversight, it also highlighted the nuclear industry's failure to disclose threats to the public health. One of the most immediate ways the Energy and Commerce Committee could promote nuclear safety would be to consider the Nuclear Release Notice Act, sponsored by Senator Obama and Congressman Weller, which would force the nuclear industry to notify the state, county, and public whenever there is an unplanned release of radioactive material in excess of legal limits. Illinois enacted legislation this year which requires nuclear plants to report leaks of radioactive material that contaminate groundwater, surface water, and the soil to state regulators within 24 hours.

In addition to these unannounced radioactive leaks, on February 20, there was a rare on-site emergency at Exelon's LaSalle facility involving control rods that are used to shut reactors down. The NRC has subsequently released a report that states that the site area emergency declared at LaSalle overstated the problem, but the incident raised several questions. First, shouldn't there be federal standards, regulated by the NRC, which outline what constitutes a nuclear emergency and mandates a particular federal response? In addition, under the ROP, individual plants are inspected more or less regularly based on their individual histories. The incidents at Davis-Besse and LaSalle beg the question why aren't all of the nation's 103 nuclear plants inspected and regulated with the highest possible frequency and standards?

Mr. Chairman, the residents of towns like Seabrook, New Hampshire, Salem, New Jersey and Braidwood, Illinois want to know definitively that things have changed since Three Mile Island. They and their families want to believe that they have nothing to fear from the nuclear plants in their towns and from the water supplies which feed the plants. Over the past several years, there have been over 4,000 unsafe incidents at the nation's 103 nuclear plants. I ask our witnesses - is the ROP the best and safest reactor oversight system we could possibly have? Knowing that so many plants have failed to meet the NRC's current safety standards - do we have the capacity and the oversight system to safely expand the number of reactors in this country? Today we should not only judge whether the ROP has been effective, we should also take a broader look to determine whether the President's plan to expand nuclear development in this country is safe and warranted.