

Message for Occupational Medicine Meeting, October 31 - November 1, 2007

Greetings from Washington and the inner-sanctuary of the Forrestal building.

I'm Glenn Podonsky, the Chief Health, Safety and Security Officer for the Department of Energy.

Unlike last year when I was able to greet you personally, this year I must send my remarks electronically. I apologize for not being with you in person however I want to use this opportunity to reaffirm my strong commitment to the occupational medicine program within the Department.

A year ago when I joined you, the Secretary had just created the Office of Health, Safety and Security and I shared with you some of our plans for strengthening the functions of health, safety and security in the Department.

It's now been one year since the Secretary created the Office of Health, Safety and Security. In fact, we were fortunate enough last week to mark the one year anniversary with an "All-Hands" meeting at which Secretary Bodman recognized some of the accomplishments we have seen in the areas of worker health and safety over the past year. These accomplishments could not have happened without the cooperation of the Under Secretaries and the contributions of the Program Offices, the sites, and all employees in concert with HSS.

Having worked for the Department under eight different Secretaries, I can honestly say that the Department is making a difference and you are a big part of that difference.

We are cleaning up the legacy of the Cold War, reducing our nuclear weapons inventory, effectively maintaining our remaining stockpile, meeting our environmental responsibilities, and performing the research necessary to achieve energy independence. This Department should celebrate its successes.

In achieving these goals, one fundamental obligation has been in the forefront of our efforts—to achieve our missions safely. In this regard, Secretary Bodman has emphasized that the safety and health of the Department's employees is one of his top priorities.

While the responsibility for implementing health, safety and environmental programs continues to reside with the Department's three Under Secretaries, the HSS mission is to establish requirements to ensure that workers have a safe

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workplace and are fully protected from the hazards associated with Department operations. We all have worked hard in this endeavor.

Over the past year, HSS, in cooperation with the safety elements of the three Under Secretaries, and others, have been able to demonstrate to all our critics that we can make a positive difference in the critical areas of health, safety and security.

This includes the integration of health and safety into all facets of work planning and performance and the encouragement of safety excellence through cooperation among labor, management, and government.

You have on your agenda a number of HSS managers and senior staff who will speak to you about some of these accomplishments. With you today, assuming they made their flights, are:

Brad Davy, Director, Office of Worker Safety and Health Assistance, who will address the potential role of the Site Occupational Medical Directors in the VPP Process.

Dr. Bonnie Richter, Director, Office of Illness and Injury Prevention Programs, who will discuss what we have been doing at the DOE on pandemic planning, and

Kathy McCarty, Acting Director, Office of Worker Safety and Health Enforcement, who will provide an update on the enforcement program.

Last year, I asked this group for occupational medical recommendations. Dr. William Brady put together some recommendations and presented them at the EFCOG Executive Meeting this past April. I've had the opportunity to review those recommendations and while this video does not provide us with a forum for discussion, I want you to know that we are working diligently to address the first recommendation –that of recruiting and hiring a Chief Medical Officer. The announcement for that position, a position that reports to the Director, Office of Health and Safety, closed on October 5. We are in the process of evaluating the senior level applicants for this critical position. We expect to fill this position within the next few weeks, assuming we are able to select a suitable applicant. Once this position is filled, we will be able to more completely address your other recommendations.

No one organization can improve safety within the complex alone. We all need to work to together; the site offices working with the program offices; both the site

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offices and program offices working with HSS; and all of us working effectively with the contractors, their workers, and other interested stakeholders to improve the safety and health of our workers, to assure our neighbors near our sites, and to protect the environment of those sites and the surrounding communities.

Your efforts and cooperation are indispensable factors in making the difference between success and failure. Thank you for contributions. I encourage you to interact with the HSS representatives there with you during the course of your meeting. Provide them with feedback on how we can make further improvements. Please don't be shy. I can assure you that we will take your comments to heart as we continue our efforts to further strengthen the health, safety and security functions of the Department.

Thank you