

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY**

Nuclear Energy Risk Management

**Friday, May 13, 2011
9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building**

Opening Statement from Chairman Andy Harris

I thank our witnesses for being here today to testify on issues relating to *Nuclear Energy Risk Management* and I look forward to hearing your testimony. First, I would like to echo Dr. Broun's disappointment with the Department of Energy's inability to provide a witness for this hearing. I recognize that the head of the Office of Nuclear Energy was unavailable due to international travel, but I would hope that with a program budget of over \$850 million, the Department has more than one individual qualified to represent it before Congress.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine nuclear energy safety, risk assessment, and public health protection. Nuclear energy is an integral piece of America's energy portfolio today and will continue to be in the future. In Maryland, one third of our electricity is generated by nuclear reactors and the state is home to two reactors located near my district, at Calvert Cliffs.

DOE's Energy Information Administration projects that U.S. electricity demand will grow by 31 percent in the next 25 years. We have to get this electricity from somewhere, and nuclear energy provides a clean, safe, and affordable source of baseload power to meet this demand.

However, as with all critical energy sources, however, producing nuclear energy is not without risk, and we must take great care to appropriately manage these risks. The March earthquake and tsunami in Japan serves as a stark reminder of this.

However, it is important to note that both the incident and the response at Fukushima did not happen in a vacuum. Both the nuclear industry and government regulators continually assess safety measures and mitigate risk. Largely due to this diligence and attentiveness, nuclear facilities are among the safest workplaces across all industries, and not a single death has ever been attributed to nuclear energy production in the United States. As we will hear today, continued improvements in reactor design and operating procedures will make nuclear energy even safer. To this end, I'm interested in learning how the Federal government can best prioritize its nuclear energy research to further reduce risks.

I'm also interested in key policy questions associated with nuclear energy risk management. For example: Is a Fukushima-like event even possible in the U.S.? Do facilities pre-stage the necessary equipment to manage unexpected incidents? What are the comparative risks associated with storage of spent nuclear fuel—scattered throughout the country or consolidated into centralized storage, such as Yucca Mountain?

Finally, as a medical doctor by training, I believe it is important be responsible when discussing potential radiological effects on public health. Senior government officials encouraging American citizens to stockpile potassium iodide pills due to detection of miniscule traces of radiation is not responsible, and can have harmful results if those pills are unnecessarily taken. This alarmism also feeds unnecessary public fears about nuclear energy, potentially harming its future viability. I hope the witnesses can help provide perspective on this issue.

I look forward to hearing today's discussion surrounding these topics. Thank you and I yield back.