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TO AN INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

ON THE

IMPACT OF YEAR 2000 ON THE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY

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Thank you, Kurt, and good morning ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Atomic Energy Control Board, welcome to Canada and to our nation's capital. It is our pleasure to be hosting you at this important workshop. I want to thank you for joining us and to wish you a pleasant and productive visit to Ottawa.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Nuclear Energy Agency for its foresight and leadership in sponsoring this international forum. The Agency has launched a comprehensive action plan to help its members deal with the year 2000 issue, of which this workshop is an important element.

Canada is a committed and active member of the Nuclear Energy Agency, and we welcome the opportunity to meet with and learn from our international colleagues. I also want to extend a special welcome to delegates from member countries of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It's wonderful to see you here today.

We've come together this week to talk about the year 2000 issue - or Y2K - which as you know refers to the potential for date-related problems that may be experienced by computers and related processes, systems and equipment when the world moves into the new millennium.

The Government of Canada - like governments around the world - is concerned about the Y2K problem and how it could affect everything from the safety of our roads and air travel to the stability of our business and banking systems. The nuclear industry's readiness for Y2K ranks high among those concerns.

Y2K is a significant issue for the safe and stable operation of nuclear power plants and other installations. It's an extremely challenging risk management project for the industry and regulators alike.

The potential for problems was recognized some time ago, and since then the nuclear industry and regulators around the world have been dealing with the Y2K issue in a comprehensive and consistent fashion. We are taking appropriate steps to safeguard the health and safety of members of the public and workers as well as protection of the environment. It's important for people to know that, and this workshop can help us get the message out.

At the same time, we cannot be complacent that everything will fall into place by the end of the year. This workshop, I believe, is an important endeavour. The global exchange of information on Y2K and the nuclear industry can only strengthen each of our own domestic action plans.

Over the next three days, you will hear how different countries are responding to the year 2000 challenge. You will hear about lessons learned to date and about plans for the future. Other sessions will address the potential international and global implications of the Y2K issue.

I am pleased to note that an entire afternoon and morning session of the workshop has been devote to contingency planning.

We are all confident that our Y2K implementation plans will achieve their objective and that all will be well as we enter the new millennium. However, this confidence is tempered with a healthy dose of concern and vigilance. No one is taking the Y2K issue lightly. There are no 100 percent guarantees, and we must be prepared for all possibilities. Contingency planning needs to move to the forefront of our Y2K strategies.

As you know, the primary responsibility for addressing the Y2K problem rests with nuclear operators. Nevertheless, regulators have an important role to play. We have an obligation to be satisfied that the industry is demonstrating Y2K readiness, and to act appropriately if this is not the case.

Here in Canada, the Atomic Energy Control Board has developed a comprehensive strategy that requires nuclear plants and other licensees to demonstrate their state of Y2K readiness by June 30, 1999. This will leave the rest of 1999 for plant staff to become familiar with changes and new procedures and prepare for a reliable transition to the new millennium. It also gives the AECB time to take action if we are not satisfied with a particular operator's Y2K readiness.

Our strategy also involves establishing a dialogue with organizations responsible for issues over which we have no control but which can affect nuclear operations. I am referring in particular to the stability of the electricity grid and of communications systems on January 1, 2000. The potential impact of the millennium bug on these external systems must be factored into our plans.

Domestically, our implementation plans are proceeding well - but Canada knows that being ready ourselves is not enough.

For the nuclear industry, there is no such thing as isolation. Nuclear safety is great importance to the entire world, and we hall have a stake in what happens in other nuclear countries. The consequences of serious nuclear accidents do not stop at national geographical boundaries.

That's why it is critical for both regulators and operators to share information with each other. Anything less would be irresponsible, in an industry where irresponsibility is not an option.

In recent years, we have witnessed ever-increasing cooperation between national regulators, both bilaterally and through organizations like the Nuclear Energy Agency and its Committee on Nuclear Regulatory Activities, as well as through regional organizations. The Atomic Energy Control Board has been working on Y2K issues with our regulatory counterparts in other countries for the past year. This workshop is a forum for even broader dialogue and mutual support.

Each and every one of us in this room today recognizes the importance of the Y2K issue for the safe operations of the nuclear industry. But Canada has some unique experience that may help explain why this workshop is being held in Ottawa.

CANDU nuclear power stations have been computer controlled beginning with Douglas Point in the 1960s and continuing on with other CANDU stations in Canada and abroad. Ontario Hydro's Darlington station near Toronto was the one of the first nuclear power plants in the world to use extensive computer technology to control major safety systems. As a result, Canada had an early opportunity to develop special expertise in assessing the safety and reliability of computerized Instrumentation and Control Systems.

In the spirit of international cooperation I just spoke about, we have willingly shared this expertise with other countries. This workshop provides an ideal opportunity for Canada to continue sharing our knowledge in this area and to learn from others around the world.

This is not the nuclear sector's first multilateral meeting on Y2K - but it is the largest, the most inclusive and the most comprehensive. Twenty nations are represented here this week, as are all facets of the nuclear community - from regulators, utilities and government officials to consultants, software specialists and technical managers.

We will all be stronger for our application in this event. We will all contribute and we will all learn. And then we will apply that knowledge to our own domestic implementation plans.

Thank you again for joining us this week. I encourage a lively and open exchange of opinions, and I wish you a productive and informative workshop.