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Home > Senate questions NRC officials over post-Fukushima safety recommendations

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On June 4, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing to question Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) officials on their progress implementing 12 safety recommendations put forth in 2011 by the Fukushima Near-Term Task Force. The recommendations included guidelines for improving regulation, emergency preparedness, and protection against natural disasters.

Witnesses included NRC Chair Allison Macfarlane and several NRC commissioners, who were confident in the NRC's progress maintaining safety and enacting proactive regulations after Fukushima. Nonetheless, Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chair of the committee, firmly pursued questioning implying that none of the 12 recommendations had been sufficiently implemented, and that no new safety standards had been enacted since the Fukushima incident. Sen. Boxer further questioned NRC officials concerning the decommissioned San Onofre nuclear power plant in southern California, which was threatened by a recent wildfire.

Sen. Boxer stressed the urgency of updating safety standards and called for increased transparency, faster risk assessment, and more robust NRC leadership. Despite the safety risks, both committee members and witnesses recognized the vital role that nuclear power could play in President Obama's Climate Action Plan to cut carbon emissions by 30 percent by 2030.

Sources: The Hill, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
