Welcome to the first 2014 issue of RE:ACTIONS, the quarterly e-newsletter highlighting NRC’s latest initiatives, developments, and opportunities for research, educational grants, and employment. This year, NRC officially turns 40! As we look forward to commemorating The Energy Reorganization Act of 1974 that created the NRC in October of that year, this issue launches a special four-part series that takes a look back at the agency’s history, key turning points, and its essential mission moving forward.

In this issue, you’ll also meet two soon-to-be NRC employees, who credit their internship experience with enabling them to actually “see the science” they had previously only been able to know in advanced studies textbooks. You’ll find out about NRC’s commitment to providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities. And you’ll learn about a Federal benefit that provides free, confidential assistance to support employees holistically in addressing a broad range of work-life issues.

From all of us here at RE:ACTIONS, our very best wishes for a great 2014! And please be sure to help spread the word about all the outstanding things NRC does every day by forwarding this issue to any student/alumni groups or campus organizations that may be interested in connecting with NRC directly.

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GREETINGS

INSIDE THE NRC:
The results are in! Once again, NRC ranks as a Best Place to Work in the Federal Government for 2013, coming in as #4 in the mid-size agency category. Driving this overall distinction is NRC’s #1 status for “Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs”—a testament to NRC’s strong commitment to programs promoting employee wellness and support. Other areas receiving top marks include NRC’s Training and Development efforts and Effective Leadership, especially in the areas of empowerment, fairness, and quality of NRC supervisors. Looking to be part of our award-winning culture? NRC expects to hire nearly 300 employees, primarily engineers, scientists, and IT and security professionals this year. For more details, please visit the Employment page of www.nrc.gov.

INSIDE:

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What's the true value of an internship? Great experience for your resume. A great way to earn while you learn. To network. To get your foot in the door of a company you’d really like to work for. But how about the chance to actually work with science that until now you’ve only read about? Or the experience of playing an active role in keeping hundreds of thousands of people safe every day? As an intern with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, you can get all of the above!

Matt Thomas (above) has found his NRC internship experience a rare opportunity to really “see the science” he’d only studied in textbooks, working towards his B.S. in Nuclear Engineering at North Carolina State University. Upon graduation, Matt began an internship at NRC in the summer of 2013. After his internship was completed, Matt received an employment offer into the prestigious NRC Nuclear Science Professional Development Program (NSPDP) for individuals from across the nation with outstanding academic achievement. Matt will begin his NSPDP engagement when he receives his Master’s degree from NC State this spring.

“I would definitely recommend recent graduates from engineering schools look into working in any one of the NRC’s many technical branches,” Matt comments, “because you get to do some actual engineering work and get up close and personal to the physical design—the real engineering aspects of designs.” He adds, “And the people there are so brilliant. And they discuss and interact with each other about any engineering matter!”

Matt also spoke candidly about the issue of nuclear power, noting, “Usually you go to school for nuclear engineering because you’re ‘pro-nuke’ but at NRC, you have to have an unbiased opinion because your bias could lead to an unsound judgment—which could ultimately lead to a catastrophe. So as a science major, it meant a lot to see that dissenting opinions were very common and accepted and how really unbiased views make the best judgments to keep everything safe as possible.”

The spirit of cooperation and objectivity was also shared by NRC intern Ian Porter (below) who describes NRC as an inviting and open place. “Everyone works together—it’s definitely not a one person show,” Ian notes, “everyone is involved in helping each other out.”

A South Carolina native, Ian is currently pursuing his PhD at the University of South Carolina, and never really considered working in the Mid-Atlantic region—let alone at NRC—until he became a research intern in the Fuel Research division at NRC Headquarters in Rockville in the summer of 2013. “Before NRC, I did not have any research experience outside of USC, and this internship in the Fuel Research division was a perfect fit with my doctoral work.” Porter plans to move to Rockville upon receiving his doctorate in December, 2014 and beginning full-time employment with NRC.

“I’ve completed several assignments as an intern already and have really enjoyed it... there were always so many people willing to go out of their way to help you. I never felt like I was an intern being pushed aside and doing nonsense work. I always felt like I was on the same level as everyone else.” Ian now looks forward to working in an exclusive close-knit group of 3-4 research scientists—a new realm he previously did not know existed.

Like Matt Thomas, Ian Porter recognizes the value of NRC internship, noting “NRC gave me an eye-opening experience...there’s lots of things you learn about but don’t really understand until you see it firsthand.”

For more information about NRC internship opportunities, please visit us at http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/employment/student-prog.html.
FEEDBACK LOOP
Q. How do summer internships work at NRC?

A. NRC’s summer internship program lasts for 89 days and generally takes place during the May to August timeframe. Students generally work in their field of study to gain practical work experience. There are additional employment programs that a student may qualify for upon completion of an internship. Applications are accepted between September and November. For complete details including eligibility requirements, please visit www.nrc.gov (keyword: Student Programs).

Have a question you’d like us to answer or information you’d like to share? Please contact us today at OHRComments.Resource@nrc.gov.

NRC IN OUR LIVES: NRC TURNS 40

Welcome to a new four-part series covering the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s history, milestones, and key contributions to the American and global community. Throughout the series, NRC Historian and author Dr. Thomas Wellock will share his insights on the agency’s past, present, and future endeavors. Before joining the NRC, Dr. Wellock received his Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Berkeley; served as a history professor at Central Washington University for 13 years; and worked as an engineer in the nuclear industry.

As we prepare to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the NRC and its current regulatory mission, it’s important to recognize that the history of regulating nuclear power dates back nearly 70 years to the dawn of the “atomic age” that brought an end to World War II. The Atomic Energy Act of 1946 established the five-member U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to manage the nation’s atomic energy programs, which had an emphasis on weapons development and secrecy.

By the early 1950s, however, perceptions that the U.S was lagging behind the peaceful atomic efforts of other world powers resulted in a shift in emphasis and a new sense of urgency. The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 brought new priorities to the AEC: encouraging widespread participation in the development and utilization of atomic energy for peaceful purposes and protecting against the hazards of peaceful applications.

According to Dr. Wellock, the combination of developing and regulating nuclear energy was not necessarily viewed as a conflict of interest. “In the 1950s this ‘marriage’ [of functions] seemed important,” explains Wellock. “At that time, regulation was less important than really developing the technology and the understanding of that technology—so as an agency, it made sense to be one.”

As private industry and public utility involvement in the industry grew and evolved, so did public awareness and concern over the potential dangers of fallout and building nuclear power plants near population centers. According to Wellock, “Reactor development in the 1960s ran up against the old Cold War thinking that nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons need to be in one agency. That seemed less and less acceptable over time as questions began to arise that the agency was really fulfilling its safety responsibilities as effectively as it was promoting nuclear power.”

In our next issue, we’ll explore how public pressure and internal agency differences would bring major changes to the roles and responsibilities of the AEC’s regulatory mission, leading to the creation of today’s NRC.
HELLO … MY NAME IS KIM ENGLISH

With extensive experience as a recruiter in the private and public sector, Kim English joined the NRC team in 2008 as Event Program Manager. In this role, she is responsible for managing the NRC outreach and recruitment events schedule for college career fairs and professional conferences—key events that help in recruiting potential applicants for jobs at NRC. “Over the past five years, my job focus has shifted from planning events for all-out recruiting during the times we’re hiring, to managing recruitment advertising that brands NRC as a top agency of choice—and keeps NRC top of mind among the audiences we’re most interested in,” she explains. “But right now—it’s back to filling jobs, jobs, jobs!”

Kim's job duties also include managing internal communications initiatives, such as promoting advancement opportunities; authoring blogs that acknowledge NRC’s award-winning culture and special honors it has received; and supporting the Students and Teachers sections of the NRC website. What does she enjoy most about working at NRC? “The difference between working here and other places I’ve worked is truly night and day,” Kim says. “The culture here is totally mission-focused—focused on the safety of people and the environment, and they really make sure everyone is heard. From technical to non-technical staff, everyone feels they matter and that they are valuable to the agency and its mission—and you’re actually held accountable for what you do.”

Aside from a common vision and values, Kim also acknowledges the helpful nature of people who work at NRC. “Everyone brings a lot to the table and people are really engaged,” she comments. “And best of all, NRC really offers a great work-life balance…I feel like at NRC I’ve really learned the meaning of a good balance between mental and physical well-being!”