

Management Excellence

Julio Lara
Director, Division of Reactor
Projects

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Years of Service: 33



Summary:

Julio Lara is nominated for the Management Excellence award for demonstrating superior leadership in the area of risk-informed thinking at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. His leadership, expertise and skillful education of the Agency's workforce has shifted the culture of staff at all levels, from entry level engineers and inspectors to senior managers across the entire agency to focus on those areas that are most risk-significant in order to enhance our mission of protecting public health and safety.

Description: Mr. Julio Lara serves as the Director of the Division of Reactor Projects in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Region III office in Lisle, IL. He is responsible for overseeing the safe operation of all commercial power reactors in the Midwest. He leads a team of inspectors stationed remotely at the reactor locations. These inspectors monitor daily operations and serve as our "eyes and ears" at the sites. In his esteemed 33-year career, he honed his technical expertise across many positions in the Agency. Over the past five years, Mr. Lara demonstrated outstanding executive leadership in advancing the NRC's vision of transforming to a modern, risk-informed regulator by leading Agency-wide efforts to prioritize focus on the most safety-significant issues affecting public health and safety. In its Strategic Plan, the Commission encouraged staff to focus its regulatory activities on the most safety-significant issues. This is a transformational shift from focusing on all activities and rules to the activities that have the biggest safety impact – a risk informed approach. Not everything requires the same level of effort, it must be adjusted based on the issue at hand. This shift requires a change of culture and Mr. Lara led the Agency in this effort. To change culture from business as usual to a more enlightened process takes education, patience and energy.

In early 2016, he commenced his executive leadership journey in support of the Commission's goals. He chaired and inspired a multi-office working group to assess the overall understanding of risk principles. As an executive champion, he recognized that the technologies the agency will regulate in the next 40 years would be different than the technologies the Agency regulated in the previous 40 years.

Over the past five years, he empowered employees throughout the agency to build ownership of initiatives and adjust processes to implement these risk initiatives. These efforts include development of risk-informed decision making action plans, workshops and tabletops, staff risk surveys and cafes, knowledge management initiatives, and developing agency-wide processes and organizational tools to expand the systematic use of risk and safety insights. Mr. Lara's engagement of the front-line inspectors was particularly crucial in driving cultural change. These efforts made an extraordinary impact on people and changing mindsets. He spearheaded increasing the risk knowledge of hundreds of inspectors, staff and leaders across the NRC, furthering their ability to focus on the most safety and risk significant aspects of implementing the mission. This knowledge was especially crucial during the reduced onsite times with COVID-19. Mr. Lara's efforts have grown and enhanced individual and organizational risk knowledge. Through educating and empowering the workforce, he developed "risk thinkers," and leaders at all levels to implement risk informed thinking and decision-making. His vision and leadership were vital in making the necessary cultural shift to support the agency's goal of becoming a modern, risk informed regulator. Mr. Lara's accomplishments are critical to increasing understanding of risk and focus on safety in order to more effectively fulfill the NRC mission of protecting public health and safety.