

## Message from NIST Director Laurie E. Locascio on the NIST Safety Commission Final Report

September 5, 2023

I established the NIST Safety Commission in December 2022 as a federal advisory committee to assess our safety programs and safety culture and to recommend changes to ensure a safe working environment for everyone on our campuses. I took this action in response to an incident that caused the death of one of our colleagues in late September 2022, shortly after I began my tenure as NIST Director. That tragedy followed a 2021 incident that caused an unplanned shutdown of NIST's research reactor. While no one was injured in that incident, it should not have happened and revealed serious safety and other lapses.

When I established the Safety Commission, I gave its members a very short timeline, fueled by the urgency of our situation. We needed outside perspectives on how to make NIST as safe as possible, and I asked them to work quickly to help move us toward this goal. The commission released its interim report with recommendations in April 2023, at the same time that NIST released a more than 1,000-page report on our internal investigation into the workplace death. The Safety Commission has now provided its final report, and I want to thank each of the commissioners for their dedication and commitment to this work. I am grateful for all they have done to help us make our people safer.

NIST is critical to the nation in so many ways. Our work underpins the ability of our companies to compete in the global economy and improves our quality of life. We have an obligation to make sure we can keep doing this vital work. Most importantly, we have an obligation to our people to make sure they can do it safely.

Some of what the commission has told us has been difficult to hear. I have dedicated more than 30 years of my career to NIST and truly care about the people of this organization. It has been particularly disturbing to hear that we have not been doing enough to honor our commitments to keep our staff safe. But this is the type of feedback we needed to hear and exactly why I established this commission — this was not required of me or of us. I am determined to make NIST an exemplary organization in which a proactive approach to safety is integrated into all we do. The entire NIST leadership team shares in this commitment.

We have no illusions about the amount of work ahead of us and have not hesitated to begin implementing many of the commission's recommendations since receiving the interim report. We have made changes to ensure that our safety professionals have an increased role, and we are benchmarking against other research laboratories, committing funding, and bringing in outside experts to guide us. We are also determined to do everything we can to address one of our greatest challenges: inadequate funding to maintain our facilities. As the report highlights, lack of investment in our facilities has left our staff members feeling unsafe and undervalued. We will do everything we can to prioritize investments in safety upgrades to our facilities, and to obtain additional funding by working with the administration and Congress to deliver world-class facilities to conduct world-class science.

The most important lesson we have learned is that we must fully integrate safety into decision-making processes for all aspects of our mission, and over the full life cycle of our programs and projects. We recognize that we must fundamentally change our culture and our way of doing business to drive meaningful change.

I commit not only my energies, but also the sustained energies of my leadership team and the whole of NIST staff to the changes that must be made. This report's comprehensive set of well-considered findings and recommendations will be a valuable roadmap as we make real and lasting change to how we work at NIST. I am confident we can make NIST a place where safety is an integral part of what it means to be a premiere scientific agency.

Laurie E. Locascio  
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NIST Director