



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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TO: John J. Linehan, Deputy Director, Division of
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FROM: Paul T. Prestholt, Sr. On-Site Licensing Representative

DATE: May 15, 1991

SUBJECT: ATTENDANCE AT 2ND ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL HIGH-LEVEL
RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

The second annual International High-Level Radioactive Waste Management Conference and Exposition was held in Las Vegas, Nevada, April 28 to May 3, 1991. I attended this conference along with representatives of the Division of High-Level Waste Management, NMSS, the Office of Research and the Center.

Earlier in 1991, I acted as the surrogate for Drs. Phillip Justus and Don Chery in developing technical sessions for this meeting. The Geotechnical Exploration session, chaired by Dr. Phillip Justus, was the result of this effort.

Two sessions, "Radionuclide Release from the Engineered Barrier System" and "Near-Field Processes Affecting the Engineered Systems", were assigned to me so that the conference had complete coverage by NRC personnel.

To me, the most important single aspect of a conference such as this is the opportunity for investigators and managers from all areas of the program to meet and talk and interact. The papers are too brief to convey any in-depth information. At best, they whet the appetite for further conversation with the author.

I believe it is very important for management and technical personnel from the NRC to attend these meetings. It gives interested persons access to the regulator in an informal setting that is impossible under normal conditions.

Since I am resident in Las Vegas, I required only the conference fee for attendance. No travel or housing was necessary. I appreciate the opportunity to attend this conference and look forward to next year.

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Participation at the Second Annual International High-Level Radioactive Waste Conference

During the week of April 29, 1991, I participated in the Second Annual International High-Level Radioactive Waste Management Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. In order to insure full coverage of all sessions at the conference, management from the Division of High-Level Waste Management assigned at least one staff member to attend each session of the conference. Because I was the staff member with the strongest background in the social sciences, I was assigned the following sessions, along with each day's plenaries and the two conference sponsored luncheons:

- Science Education and Public Awareness
- International Panel on Public Education About High-Level Waste
- Risk Perception and Public Involvement
- Intergovernmental Issues

In addition, I gave my paper titled "Regulatory Systems-Based Licensing Guidance Documentation" at the Implementation of Selected Regulatory Processes session. I was asked one question directly after my presentation. The question was whether or not I felt that there was enough communication between the NRC and DOE staffs. I responded by explaining about the system of formal meetings and technical exchanges in the High-Level Waste Repository program and mentioning regular telephone communications between the licensing staff at DOE and NRC's repository projects staff. After the session ended, several staffers from SAIC, one of DOE's contractors, spoke to me about my paper and about the specific documents I had discussed in it. The session also contained two papers on Quality Assurance and two papers on the Licensing Support System (LSS). I thought that Chip Cameron's presentation was particularly effective in explaining the status of the LSS program. The second LSS paper was presented by Mary MacNabb from the University of Nevada at Las Vegas (UNLV). Her purpose seemed to be to engage in NRC/DOE bashing and in putting forth the idea that UNLV (her employer) was the logical organization to run the LSS (with federal funds). Chip rebutted several of her more flawed and incorrect assertions in an admirable professional fashion.

I found the other sessions that I attended and the plenaries to be interesting and useful. A prevalent topic by the American presenters in these sessions was the general ineffectiveness of education on nuclear power in America and the inability of government officials to resolve the "not in my backyard" or NIMBY phenomenon. By contrast the European presenters discussed the success of their education programs in the nuclear area. I was particularly interested in the presentation by Britain's BNFL. While differences in our political and educational systems would make duplication of their specific methods difficult here, their approach to an integrated education program for elementary and secondary school children was interesting.

The discussions of NIMBY and risk perception were somewhat uneven. Since social science is not overly emphasized in this program, that is to be expected. The papers presented left me feeling that, with regard to repository siting, much analysis remains to be done to solve the problems of NIMBY and risk perception. The presenters have explored the dimensions of the problems, but have not yet started to develop models for problem solving or recommending solutions. I had a very useful discussion with Ruth Wehner, formerly of the Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses (and a member of the program committee), on this topic and I suggested several areas where there was an obvious need for further analysis of these questions. I hope that either NRC, DOE or their respective contractors will remain involved in the planning and analyses of abstracts and papers for future conferences to assure that the social science sessions focus on more than problems in the future.

Several of the plenary session speakers deserve recognition. Margaret Maxey, the keynote speaker, gave a fascinating speech which I hope is disseminated to the entire NRC staff. She spoke of the responsibility of the scientific community to challenge popular, but unfounded (or unproven) ideas. She identified Rachel Carson's seminal discourse of environmentalism "Silent Spring" as something of a culprit in beginning the belief that humankind was irreparably damaging the planet. Her thesis, in part, is that the environmental movement has not given credit to the planet's inherent ability to restore itself. While I feel she gave short shrift to some of the obvious successes that came out of the movement to clean our rivers and air, her speech deeply touched me. The speech by the Governor of Nevada should be noted as a highly effective use of free media time by a political leader. Carl Gertz's response to the governor at the beginning of the Social Systems Plenary two days later should be commended for being measured and rational. Finally I would note Commissioner Curtiss's speech which was excellent and well received.

The scheduling of sessions from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM kept staff members fully engaged and did not leave time for other activities.


Mark S. Delligatti