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STEERING COMMITTEE.FOR NUCLEAR ENERGY

WORKSHOP ON RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT  
AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

(Report by the Secretariat)

1. Following the decision taken by the Steering Committee at its meeting on 23rd-24th April 1986 [NE/M(86)1, item 12(b)], a Workshop was held in Paris on 9th-11th February 1987 to identify the range of problems concerning public perception of radioactive waste management issues, to review current national public information programmes, and to identify ways in which public understanding of radioactive waste management might be improved.
2. The Workshop was attended by some 50 participants from sixteen Member countries and three international organisations (IAEA, CEC and the Uranium Institute). Participants came from national radioactive waste management agencies, public information and public relations offices, energy departments, atomic energy organisations, public communications, etc. Four specialists had been invited to make presentations focussing on typical issues associated with the subject of communication with the public. The Workshop was placed under the chairmanship of Dr. Rudolf Rometsch (Switzerland), who is also the current Chairman of the NEA Radioactive Waste Management Committee.
3. The programme, which had been prepared in consultation with that Committee, included:
  - A discussion of four generic issues: public perception of radioactive waste management and disposal; structure of public opinion and communication; what the media expected from the radioactive waste management community; and experience in public communication by the chemical industry.
  - A presentation and review of national experiences in eight Member countries with significant radioactive waste management programmes and related public information activities.

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- Discussion of specific issues in four parallel Working Groups:

1. Better answers to waste management questions asked by the public and the influence one country's programme can have on other countries.
  2. The role of local involvement in site-specific issues.
  3. Socio-economic aspects of a waste management site.
  4. The effectiveness of various public information and education materials; the role of international organisations.
- Presentation of the conclusions of the four Working Groups in plenary session followed by a Panel discussion.
- Display of public information materials provided by participants, including screening of films and video tapes on national radioactive waste management programmes.

5. This programme was well received and resulted in frank and open discussions on practical experience gained in public information activities, as well as extensive exchanges on a wide range of related issues. Participants generally recognised that the value of such meetings being held at the international level was twofold: first, they can assist national authorities in improving their grasp on public information and communication issues related to nuclear waste management; and second, they help them better co-ordinate their actions with a view to increasing the openness and effectiveness of national information policies and practices. Participants also welcomed the fact that, for the first time in an NEA meeting, representatives from the chemical industry were available to discuss common aspects of public information problems. It was clear that, in this area like in many others, the experience gained in the nuclear industry can have interesting spin-off effects in handling similar issues in more classical industrial fields.

6. Experience drawn from national public information efforts during the last few years shows that gaining the confidence of local authorities and the populations directly concerned by the siting of a waste storage or disposal facility is of overriding importance. In such an endeavour, the assistance of communications specialists have proved to be of great value. Before any decision-making on a proposed radioactive waste site, it is essential to provide for the involvement of local people at the earliest stage in an open, fair and comprehensive review of proposed plans. The emphasis should be on explaining broad objectives rather than detailed technical aspects. As radioactive waste management is perceived more as a social than a technical problem, the role of technical information in public acceptance activities is only of limited value.

7. The role of international organisations in public information related to nuclear waste management was discussed in one of the Working Groups, and the conclusions were presented in plenary session. The Workshop participants recommended that NEA should continue to make a distinctive contribution in this field. In addition to continued efforts to develop consensus statements on technical issues, standards and multi-national achievements to serve as reliable and credible sources supporting national programmes, it was recommended that the NEA fulfill the following tasks:

STEERING COMMITTEE FOR NUCLEAR ENERGY

PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE FUTURE  
OF THE NEA DATA BANK

Opinion of the Performance Assessment Advisory Group  
of the Radioactive Waste Management Committee (RWMC)

(Note by the Secretariat)

1. At its meeting on 16th-18th March 1987, the RWMC Performance Assessment Advisory Group (PAAG) reviewed the proposed plan for computer-based activities and cooperation with the NEA Data Bank in the field of radioactive waste management [see NE(87)6, Section V.A]. This review was based on previous consultations with consultants, members of the RWMC and of the Executive Committee of the International Sorption Information Retrieval System (ISIRS) and PAAG members themselves. The present document reflects all these consultations and particularly the discussions at the PAAG meeting.

2. The Performance Assessment Advisory Group confirmed the need for the high priority to be given to activities related to long-term performance assessment of disposal systems and the associated computer-based techniques. Noting that the NEA Data Bank has already begun to support on a modest scale a number of well-established projects within NEA, such as the ISIRS System, the Thermochemical Data Base (TDB) and the work of the PSAC User Group (Probabilistic Systems Assessment Codes User Group), PAAG strongly supported the proposals concerning the future of the NEA Data Bank in the area of radioactive waste management. In particular, PAAG welcomed the role of NEA and of the Data Bank as a catalyst and coordinator for international activities on performance assessment and agreed that increased efforts in this field would enhance considerably the credibility of performance assessment tools. PAAG also agreed in general with priorities indicated in document NE(87)6 with regard to the work on data bases and on computer codes and with the type of services to be provided by the Data Bank. However, the group advised the Secretariat to carefully keep under control the amount of work involved. It was also confirmed that NEA itself would probably not play an active role in the carrying out of actual performance assessment calculations.

3. As a conclusion, therefore, the need for NEA to reinforce its competence and resources in an area of high priority and under rapid development was clearly recognised, particularly if the Agency is expected to continue to remain at the forefront of activities in the field of performance assessment through PAAG and the RWMC. A great deal of efforts is currently devoted at national level to the development of improved methodologies and scientific tools for performance assessment. In this context, it appears desirable for NEA to aim essentially at upgrading these efforts through international cooperation that will promote increased confidence in data bases and computer programmes being used for performance assessment.

4. The Steering Committee is invited to take note of the views of the RWMC Performance Assessment Advisory Group as expressed above in its discussions of document NE(87)6 on the future of the NEA Data Bank.

- (i) to act as a clearing house for various types of national public information material as well as up-to-date information on the development of national waste management programmes and plans;
- (ii) to keep public information specialists in touch with each other by means of a newsletter or other services; and
- (iii) to sponsor similar meetings from time to time in the future as well as more restricted meetings for detailed discussion of specific public information issues, as appropriate.

8. As a first step, and in line with recommendation (i), work is beginning, in co-operation with SKB in Sweden, on the development of an NEA series of national public information brochures or fact sheets describing the main features and current status of national waste management programmes. This series, to be used as part of national public information programmes, is intended to help bridge the information gap which presently exists in the public at the national level concerning the existence and characteristics of other national waste management programmes. It is emphasized that the sponsorship by NEA of the production and circulation of this material will not entail any sizeable expenditure for the Agency.

9. Participants in the Workshop joined the Steering Committee in requesting that there should be no official transcript or proceedings of the Workshop, but a short summary will be prepared by the Secretariat for the convenience of individual participants.

10. The Steering Committee is invited:

- (i) to take note of the results of the Workshop on Radioactive Waste Management and Public Information; and
- (ii) to support the initiatives under way for follow-up activities by the NEA in this field as set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 above.