
Strengthening Trust: ***NRC and Groundwater Protection***

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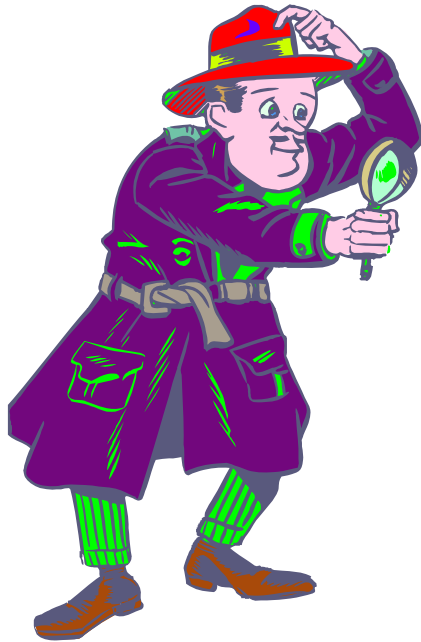
October 4, 2010

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Insights from Public Opinion Research



- Focus groups on tritium, groundwater, and underground piping
- September 2010
- Sponsored by Nuclear Energy Institute, as part of ongoing public opinion research program

Address Public Concerns

- **Control:** public wants to know that responsible actions are taken to find and fix problems:
 - When, where, why, how?
 - **Proactive** efforts to prevent future problems
- **Oversight:** public wants strong independent regulator(s).
- **Transparency:** public wants assurance that dangers are not hidden.
- **Safety and health effects:** public wants multiple validations, yardstick.

Explain NRC Role

- The name conveys regulatory oversight, but more information is needed:
 - Independent regulatory agency
 - Mission to protect public health and safety and the environment
 - Monitors and inspects every nuclear power plant daily
 - Will shut plants down, if unsafe
 - Experts on nuclear energy and radiation
- May need to counter perception that NRC promotes nuclear energy.

Use Simple Clear Language

Terms and concepts that are not understood:

- **Groundwater:** pollution, runoff
- **Tritium:** unfamiliar term, what is it?
- **Picocuries, millirem, isotopes/radioisotopes:** unfamiliar terms, can be turned off
- **Standard** (e.g. EPA Safe Drinking Water Standard): not clear that means safe level
- **Cosmic rays:** no idea; say sun and stars
- **Nuclear industry:** not clear reference is to power plants
- **Contaminated:** totally unsafe
- **Half-life of 12.3 years:** scary
- **Buried piping:** not reachable, dead; say underground piping
- **Below grade:** conveys inferior quality to some

Use Simple Visuals

- Public seeks a yardstick. Examples that help:
 - ❑ Amount of tritium found in the water compared with a level determined to be safe (by EPA)
 - ❑ Number of glasses of water with this amount of tritium one would have to drink to get the same dose of radiation one would get from drinking one glass of orange juice (or other food or beverage)

Implications for 4 Questions to Our Panel

1. To increase confidence: use simple, clear, consistent communications that focus on public concerns; explain role of NRC.
2. Multiple validations: skeptical public wants to hear from more than one source, such as from other public health agencies.
3. International Nuclear Event Scale: not tested; public seeking some validation and yardstick on health effects.
4. Enhanced public awareness of the role of different agencies in regulating nuclear energy: A primer would help, along with joint appearances at information events when an incident occurs.