

INTEGRATING PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES
ON A TECHNICAL PROJECT

Sheila K. Little
Communications Manager
Westinghouse Electric Corp.
WIPP Project
Albuquerque, NM

S. F. Vecchiola
Administration Manager
Westinghouse Electric Corp.
WIPP Project
Albuquerque, NM

A common goal that is gaining importance within the nuclear field is to reach and provide information to the public on the issue of nuclear waste. Speaking from our experience on the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) Project in southeastern New Mexico, we are of the opinion that an active public information program is essential and, in fact, has proven to be invaluable to our project. Usually manpower and budget for public information activities are difficult to obtain and must be justified on the basis of benefit to the Project. At WIPP, therefore, we have tailored an organization that serves the dual purpose of providing public information while serving a vital support function for the project. Thus, the public information activities are more integrated into the project's workscope.

Communications on the WIPP Project has steadily evolved to encompass the activities comparable to public affairs, public relations, graphics, photography, and resource materials. Combining diverse, yet related, activities allows the public information activities to be more readily accepted into a technical atmosphere. From those on technical projects who initially do not recognize the value of good public information activities, the common question is: "Why do we need public information people?" With this attitude, we must realize that public information groups need to work for public understanding while also striving for project acceptance and recognition. Gaining Project support allows the public information activities to interface more readily with the technical activities and conversely to relay feedback to the entire project. So, we see promoting this harmonious exchange both with the public and within the project as the ultimate challenge and goal for an effective Public Information group.

From the very beginning, DOE and Westinghouse recognized that a public information program was needed on the WIPP Project. Obviously, the first nuclear waste facility would create questions and arouse public interest! Fortunately, Westinghouse, in the role of Technical Support Contractor, had extensive experience in the public information arena. The highly successful Campus America Program, which trained technical people to address college audiences on nuclear energy, served as a model for the WIPP Speaker's Bureau.

Although prior experience existed and previous recognition had been given regarding the need for public information, the implementation of the program became a secondary concern in the initial flurry of activity on the WIPP Project. Everyone supported the concept, but no one anticipated the extensive effort required to produce an effective program. Therefore, public information became secondary in importance within the technical groups where the major efforts were directed toward design reviews and site

validation. Since the majority of the early information requests were of a technical nature, the project proceeded with a public information group that stressed technical data.

Gradually difficulties surfaced as the requests for public information increased. The various engineering groups juggling the public information duties were devoting an increasing amount of time to preparing flyers and booklets, monitoring displays and attending conferences. Also at this stage it became apparent that a more diverse group of participants representing both the nontechnical and technical approach was needed in order for the Speaker's Bureau to reach and appeal to a greater cross-section of social and civic clubs. Then in 1981, a major litigation hurdle loomed on the horizon for WIPP. This litigation highlighted the problem with only the technical organization handling public information. Namely, the engineering groups could no longer handle or respond to the numerous public information duties in conjunction with the technical work necessary to support design and litigation requirements.

Finally 2 1/2 years ago, public information activities were centralized in a newly formed group.

WIPP CONCEPT SATISFACTORILY
COMBINES ALL RELATED FUNCTIONS



Fig. 1. Organizational responsibilities and activities.

The philosophy for the new organization surpassed the traditional public information duties and pulled together all the activities necessary to support the

technical needs of the Project.

- 1) Speaker's Bureau -- Volunteers from several project groups, including technical and administrative, with a variety of educational backgrounds went to club meetings to explain and discuss the WIPP. This outreach group has actively sought community-related activities to enhance the project's image and visibility. In addition, we have given presentations to technical and professional clubs, such as AIME and ASCE, university classes, and civic clubs, such as Rotary. Utilizing our technical expertise, we have judged and monitored science fair projects and conferences, including the International Science and Engineering Fair. In conjunction with normal Project functions the Speaker's Bureau also has supported the public hearings conducted on WIPP and testimony to the Radioactive Materials Committee.
- 2) Tour Coordination -- Tour activities actually had a significant impact on Project morale. The increasing interest of foreign visitors and national leaders convinced the entire Project that WIPP was reaching its fruition. Scientists and diplomats from a variety of countries, such as France, Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, Italy and Belgium have visited WIPP and are amazed at our progress, because we signify an active effort toward solving a serious international problem. The Atomic Industrial Forum (AIF) and Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) have also indicated how relevant our Project's experimental data and spin-off technology is to furthering other nuclear waste-related activities.
- 3) Photography/Video Tape Services -- Photography progressed from a simple collection of photos to a retrievable collection of professional photos documenting the Site construction progress. Also, in addition to the historical significance, these photos were put to practical use and assembled for photo books and used in presentations.

The photos and video tapes have also supplemented many articles, so the significance of this activity is being broadened from merely a technical collection to a vital portion of the public information activities that has instant appeal to the media and public.

- 4) Reference Center -- WIPP has seven public reading rooms that provide the public with direct access to all the reports and studies prepared for and by WIPP. Located in public, university, state and Department of Energy facilities, these public reading rooms reinforce the idea that WIPP is an unclassified project that welcomes public interest. This attitude elevated the public reading rooms from a technical repository status to a viable public outreach effort. In addition, a more comprehensive reference center has been established in the office for the engineers to use. By networking with other scientific and government facilities, the volume of information of

both a technical and nontechnical nature available to our professionals has tremendously expanded.

PUBLIC READING ROOMS CONSOLIDATE ALL WIPP INFO

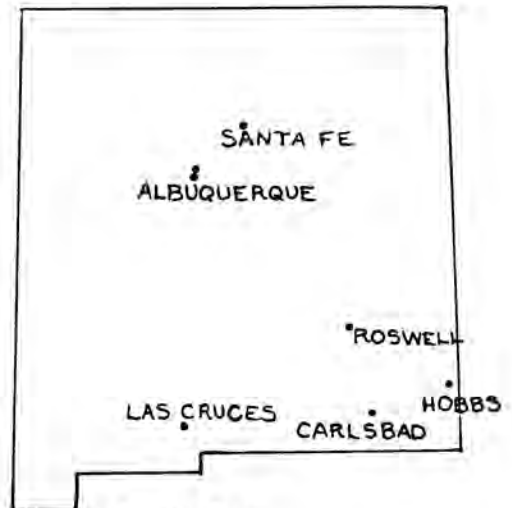


Fig. 2. Public Reading Rooms.

- 5) Graphics -- With increased public information activity, the engineering drafting support which prepared technical diagrams and flow charts had to be expanded to allow a more creative and original approach. We currently design and prepare information flyers, photo books and displays; all of which are oriented to public interests and readability.
- 6) Word Processing -- Word Processing has proven to be a valuable communication link to distant offices. Through the use of telecommunications, press releases or documents issued in Washington can be received in Albuquerque within a matter of minutes. This immediacy which is taken for granted in corporate offices is necessary for a field office in Albuquerque/Carlsbad that extensively communicates with Washington, D.C. and Pittsburgh.

Therefore, these activities were assembled under the Communications groups with one major objective: to provide information to the public while also supporting the Project's needs. This recognition that public information and technical support activities can exist and, in fact, complement each other was a significant breakthrough in establishing the credibility and acceptance of Public Information.

At this time, I would like to focus on the Speaker's Bureau which consists of engineers, schedulers, miners and institutional coordinators who share the same desire: to help the public understand the WIPP Project. Through this volunteer group we have been able to initiate many community contacts and support programs related to public information that would have been overlooked in a traditional organization that separates public information and technical duties. In addition, this group has implemented a dimension of public information that actively involves and relies upon project support. Consequently, the Speaker's Bureau is no longer a secondary activity but is considered a major channel

for reaching the community. The volunteers received their initial training from Dr. Claude Poncelet, Ms. Sandra Keifer and Dr. Noelle Poncelet, founders and organizers of the Westinghouse Campus America Program. They focused on responding to hostile questions, empathizing with concerns of the audience, recognizing the hidden concerns within questions and replying to interviewers. Then using individual preferences and hobbies, we matched each speaker with his audience. Based on feedback from both the speakers and several clubs, we have an excellent record for pairing people with clubs that have similar interests and promote a natural rapport.

SPEAKERS BUREAU HAS PROMOTED BOTH COMMUNITY AND PROJECT GOODWILL

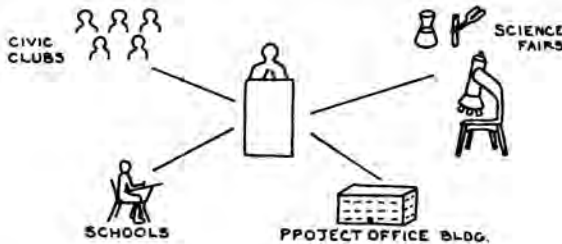


Fig. 3. Speaker's Bureau Activities.

Yet with all this vitality, our greatest obstacle was keeping the Speaker's Bureau informed and in practice. The engineers knew details that the schedulers didn't and vice versa. However, we discovered that this lack of knowledge or awareness about other departments activities represented a universal situation on the Project. So, instead of accepting this communication breakdown, the Speaker's Bureau decided to further their cause and use this deficiency as a stepping stone for greater Project involvement and visibility.

Because a sincere effort was needed to keep the employees informed and aware of developments on WIPP, the Speaker's Bureau initiated an in-house public information effort. After all, when a neighbor asks a general question about the project, you as an employee, take pride in being able to respond with a high degree of confidence. Consequently, a Lyceum Series was undertaken on a monthly basis to share and exchange information of current interest. For example, we have discussed a variety of topics, including litigation status, relocation policies, mining techniques, and proposal/budget preparation, at several of our sessions. Presented and organized by Speaker's Bureau participants, the entire staff was invited to hear these updates and to suggest topics for future sessions. In turn, by establishing this two way exchange, management appreciation and staff support of public information/Speaker's Bureau activities has dramatically increased.

In conclusion, through gradual evolution and successful performance the WIPP Communications group has gained respect and recognition as a dual service organization that offers numerous benefits to a technical project. Westinghouse assembled a team that has successfully coordinated and encouraged an exchange of information not only within the public information realm but also as a project service and function. For more effective utilization of its resources, WIPP has combined educational services,

external and employee communication and public information into one unit called Communications.

COMMUNICATIONS PERFORMS A DUAL ROLE ON WIPP



Fig. 4. Communications Department's role.