

"REPOSITORY SITING: ENCOURAGING A COOPERATIVE MODE"

Dr. Sally A. Mann
Manager, Crystalline Repository Project
U. S. Department of Energy
Argonne, Illinois

ABSTRACT

DOE's Crystalline Repository Project is currently studying rock bodies in 17 states in an attempt to locate a suitable site in crystalline rock for this potential second repository. As the site selection process proceeds, public understanding and institutional participation continue to be vital aspects of solving this complex national problem. Unique institutional challenges face the Department of Energy in carrying out an effective siting program.

We've been invited here today to speak with you about institutional interactions in the siting of a repository and to address my experiences as the Manager of the Crystalline Repository Project, including issues and proposed solutions. I'm sure you would all agree that that's a tall order for my 15-minute time limit. What I would like to do is to highlight some of the Crystalline Repository Project's major activities and hit what I feel are some of the major underlying issues which make this such a difficult task.

To illustrate the environment in which these activities must take place I'd like to relate to you some opening questions asked by one of my staff at a meeting with interested citizens:

"How many of you believe we have a need for permanent safe disposal of HLW?"

All hands were enthusiastically thrust high in the air.

"How many of you want the repository sited in your locale?"

No hands; everyone lowered their eyes.

We think this illustrates the two main issues which must be addressed by the program: (1.) the technical issue, and (2.) the emotional issue. Both issues are very real and serious. In order for the program to succeed, the technical issues must be fully addressed and solved in a manner that allows them to be used, in turn, to address and solve the emotional issues. Key to satisfactory resolution of the issues is openness, communication, joint participation, and mutual understanding. This is the environment for which we are striving.

Most people acknowledge the need for safe disposal of high-level waste. Likewise, most people can also relate to the coined term "NIMBY," "not in my backyard." We are all individuals; human beings, with personal reactions and individual opinions and perspectives. We can collectively have major objectives, but they may be driven by different motivations. I ask you, for the next few moments, to focus on the major objective that we share collectively - safe disposal of high-level waste.

How do we accomplish such an important endeavor? Not only important to us, but important to generations to come.

Congress, has provided a framework in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act that acknowledges all of the entities involved in such a complex and important endeavor. The Department of Energy is responsible for implementation, and a crucial balancing of needs and objectives of many diverse groups. The utilities are interested in a technically and institutionally sound success at a reasonable cost. The States and Indian Tribes are interested in protection of their home interests which, in the cases seen to date, involve the safe siting of a repository somewhere other than their own locale.

When combining the basic fact that the involved groups have different interests and objectives, with the size, duration, and complexity of this program, it becomes awesome quickly. In addition, something this complex is not likely by its very nature to produce total consensus.

We need effective communication channels, an understanding of objectives of all parties involved, and a channeling of our respective efforts to productive ends.

We are continually faced with a delicate balancing of all needs and objectives. Many issues and often conflicting opinions result from judgements made at every step. Available resources are often insufficient, as reflected in our ability to respond timely, on all sides. Credibility is often questioned, by one party or another. Trust is gained slowly, and lost easily. Emotions run high and are strongly based on commitments to respective efforts. All of these play a role and apply to all groups involved in the process.

Recognizing the obstacles, what is being done to overcome, or at least minimize, them?

As mentioned earlier, Congress has constructed a framework within the Act which provides many steps: funds to operate the program; extensive State, Tribal, and public involvement, including

grants and agreements, as vehicles for such participation, to name a few. Our job is to effect successful working of the process.

The Crystalline Repository Project has had the advantage of the enactment of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act at an early stage of its activities. During the Regional Studies, state participation played a significant role. Because of their early involvement and comments, the process was changed to incorporate their suggested strategy for the timing of the compilation of the data base in the RCR's, and development of the Screening Methodology for application to that data base.

The Crystalline Project has also had a disadvantage regarding the NWPA, since it is silent with respect to requirements for institutional interactions preceding the identification of potentially acceptable sites. Therefore, we had to break new ground on many issues with respect to grants agreements, level of participation, and even who the appropriate entities were to interact with at this stage. The primary objective has been to model our activities on the intent of the NWPA provisions, and to develop a phased approach to involvement to be ready to meet all requirements at the time we reach PAS identification. We have carried out our activities in a manner that we believe best balances effectiveness and reasonableness, within funding and staffing limitations.

A long standing point of discussion has been "the process"—open versus closed. The Screening Methodology development demonstrates, very well, the objectives and issues of the open process. The Department conducted workshops with representatives of the 17 states to develop a list of geologic and environmental factors to be used in screening down from 235 rock bodies to the currently proposed 12 potentially acceptable sites. In addition to determining which factors to use, we also developed definitions, scale values, and ultimately, sets of weights to determine the relative importance of each of those. The objective was to maximize participation, strive for consensus on technical points, and to produce a document which considered a broad spectrum of opinions and resulted in a technically sound and defensible methodology.

The Crystalline Repository Project has been striving to maximize participation and

communication. We have many examples to demonstrate that: State participation in the screening methodology development; review of two draft versions of the Regional Characterization Reports; standing policy of DOE participation in public meetings at request, within resource limitations; frequent meetings with representatives to discuss current activities and plan; provision of grants; provision of computer terminals and access to the data base, etc. We are just beginning this process with the potentially affected Indian Tribes, and have a ways to go to fully involve all parties at the level needed to accomplish our goals.

We also have examples where we have not been able to accommodate all requests, and there are often disagreements on the reasonableness of requests. The key is open communication and the need to keep an open mind to understand needs and objectives of everyone involved.

What have we learned from this process?

1. Differences of opinion are vast.

There is no such thing as total consensus on such complex factors, neither on a technical basis, nor on the more subjective issues of value judgements and trade-offs.

2. There is significant value and benefit in external participation.

It resulted in increased consideration by DOE of technical opinions. It provided a better awareness and understanding, by the State representatives, of the issues, the process, and in the case of the screening process workshops, the resulting methodology itself.

3. The Department, however, must exercise its responsibility and authority in the final decisions. The methodology represents consideration of all opinions, but no single State can, or would endorse it as their own final product.

We are all continuing to learn in this process and need to strive for idealistic results while balancing realistic limitations.