

## PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS TRANSPORTATION

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### ABSTRACT

Over the past several years, there have been numerous papers and presentations pointing out the need for an active and understandable public information program on radioactive materials transportation. The Secretary of Energy has officially recognized this need for more information exchange by pledging a "new culture" at the Department. Part of this initiative involves addressing problems and issues with new tools and attitudes and interacting with the public in an "open, forthright, consultative process." The Secretary has assured the public this is "not just lip service" but involves a "new partnership" between the Department of Energy (DOE) and the public. In keeping with this philosophy, DOE's Transportation Management Division (TMD) has been shifting its strategy from merely providing information products to a more "face-to-face" interactive approach with the many audiences interested in DOE transportation.

To many of those in the transportation industry, the need to keep the public informed is not always obvious. However:

- Public tolerance, if not acceptance, of radioactive material transportation is necessary for smooth operations.
- Generally, the public has some knowledge about radioactive materials transportation, but all too often, it is a distorted view or incomplete knowledge.
- Most people are genuinely concerned about safety, but they don't just want to be told "it's safe;" they want to know how it's safe.
- There is a tendency to rely on technical information and jargon, that is familiar; but technical facts are not enough.
- The best communication begins with listening. In the past, public information has mostly been a one-way street.
- It's a fine line to walk: enough, but not too much; simple, but not too simple.

This paper will address the need for information and communications and DOE's program for radioactive material transportation.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, there have been numerous papers and presentations pointing out the need for an active and understandable public information program on radioactive materials transportation. The Secretary of Energy has officially recognized this need for more information exchange by pledging a "new culture" at the Department. Part of this initiative involves addressing problems and issues with new tools and attitudes and interacting with the public in an "open, forthright, consultative process." The Secretary has assured the public this is "not just lip service" but involves a "new partnership" between the Department of Energy (DOE) and the public. In keeping with this philosophy, DOE's Transportation Management Division (TMD) has been shifting its strategy from merely providing information products to a more "face-to-face" interactive

approach with the many audiences interested in DOE transportation.

In a 1989 issue of *Nuclear Waste News*, it was reported over 200 Congressional staffers responded to a Congressional Information Program survey. They indicated information on transportation of radioactive materials would be "very helpful". The topic of transportation was second only to radioactive waste disposal. Additionally, the results of a 1989 interactive workshop for local government officials and DOE managers included recommendations for expanding the existing public information program with emphasis on a database of relevant information and general public education.

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The good news is that progress is occurring.

#### **PUBLIC TOLERANCE OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS TRANSPORTATION IS NECESSARY FOR SMOOTH OPERATIONS**

Transportation of radioactive materials is crucial to the mission and public tolerance of these movements is crucial to smooth, efficient operations. As DOE expands its clean-up efforts and new repositories open, shipments of waste will increase in the coming years bringing with them even higher levels of public visibility for all our shipments. Recognizing and understanding that public tolerance and, if possible, public acceptance, are important to smooth operations will go a long way toward avoiding lawsuits, "bad press," and restrictive State laws.

#### **OFTEN, THE PUBLIC'S VIEW IS DISTORTED**

Many papers have been written and presented and much research has been done documenting the perceptions of the media and the public. We've all heard the stories that casks have radioactive liquid in them and leak; that if any radiation is detectable, there is considerable danger; that if a cask cracked or breached and radiation leaked out, the area would be uninhabitable for centuries. Misconceptions abound.

#### **PEOPLE ARE GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT SAFETY**

We have all agonized over dramatic headlines and news stories which show an exaggerated reaction to issues involving radioactive materials. However, because people are concerned about safety, this kind of presentation grabs their attention. People read headlines and accept them as fact.

With so many issues competing for the public's attention, it is easier and more palatable to consume spicy bites of information than to perform in-depth studies on how issues will affect them. We can't send out *technical reports* hoping that the public will read them and have another perspective. If we hope to compete to tell our story, we need to communicate, entertainingly, to attract and retain attention and, then, strive to be succinct and effective in conveying the information.

#### **TECHNICAL FACTS ARE NOT ENOUGH**

While a wealth of information on radioactive materials transportation exists, it is largely targeted toward a technical audience. Technical facts help package designers, logistics and operations personnel, and shippers, carriers, inspection and emergency response personnel. However, these facts, alone, are insufficient for communicating with the general public; they must be interpreted in interesting and meaningful ways. Additionally, values and attitudes must be considered.

Technical facts must also be presented within the larger context of a comprehensive and consistent program that takes into account the gap between the scientific community and the public in their perceptions. A substantial body of research has documented this phenomenon. To bridge this gap, there must first be a dialogue between the engineers and the public information, public affairs, and institutional people. Then the engineers need to be trained in effective communication with the public and the public information people must have open lines of communication with the engineers so they can be well informed, able to present the facts, and back them up.

#### **THE BEST COMMUNICATION BEGINS WITH LISTENING**

Too often, in the past, the approach has been to let the overall unspoken, unwritten message be "Trust us, we know what we're doing. This is science and there is no room for attitudes, values, or emotions. If you could understand the logic and the facts, you would be on our side." Good communication begins with listening and understanding that the public's concerns are real and legitimate. We all tend to fall into a mindset that says "we know what we're doing and we're paid to do this job and the public should just let us do it." But the public's concerns are real and legitimate and occasionally, we are surprised at their insights. It's easy for us, in our own worlds, to disregard their concerns. But, with the right attitude, we can use their concerns as a tool and not as an obstacle. It's basic and may be considered a cliché, but we should remember: there are no problems, only solutions and learning situations. This can take us a long way in our dialogue with the public.

To the public, trusting those in charge has not been fine, when TMI, Chernobyl, Love Canal, the Exxon oil spill in

Alaska, and the environmental problems at DOE sites can happen. Once credibility is damaged, it is extremely difficult to rebuild; some would say impossible. However, it is better to begin today, than procrastinate.

You may be thinking, "but DOE has had information programs in place since the 50's." If this is so, why is credibility so low and the gap so large? The answer is the *communication* has been largely a one-way street. Public concerns were not taken into account. Institutions have "provided" information.

It's time to listen as well as tell the story. In the past, we have given lip service to public information programs. But, we need to take the situation seriously. People are intelligent and interested and don't want to be told the "right" things to believe. We need to hear their concerns and provide information so they make their own decisions.

### IT'S A FINE LINE

There are two key areas where the line is fine. When is DOE "selling" OR presenting objective, factual information? When is DOE being technically exact to the smallest detail OR communicating accurate, clear, concise information written for the average American to understand?

According to the Acts creating DOE and its predecessors, the Department has a responsibility for "developing, collecting, distributing, and making available for distribution, scientific and technical information concerning the manufacture or development of energy and its efficient extraction, conversion, transmission, and utilization" and "creating and encouraging the development of general information to the public on all energy conservation technologies and energy sources as they become available for the general use, and the Administrator, in conjunction with the Administrator of Federal Energy Administration shall, to the extent practicable, disseminate such information through the use of mass communications."

We walk a fine line between objectivity and "sales." Admittedly, this is difficult when we are passionate about our work and believe in what we do. DOE must not appear to be selling or advertising a particular view, so we must be extremely careful in presenting objective, factual, timely information.

Often, in interpreting the Federal regulations concerning hazardous materials transportation, it is difficult to give a concise overview of such a complex subject and "translate" the regulations into a form understandable to those working in the field. It is even more difficult doing so for the general public. Two good examples of this are interpreting the regulatory descriptions of package testing and the requirements for Highway Route Controlled Quantity (HRCQ) shipments. Inevitably, when trying to summarize, someone points out all of the exceptions and details that are necessary in the regulations, but are not necessary to the general

public. One solution is to quote the citation for those who want more detailed information. However, there will always be someone who believes we are "misleading" the public, when perhaps, they are scraping for any reason to criticize.

In examining the second "fine line", it is well to remember as we compile this information and put it into a presentation format, we are competing with other crises and issues in the news. In addition, most people don't have time to read a lot of technical information. They depend on concise reports from the media and public interest groups. We must also give them concise information. We must get their attention, but not insult their intelligence.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE?

What is being done about the perception gap and the damaged credibility?

Federal agencies have been required to involve the public in decisions regarding Federal actions since the passage of the National Environmental Protection Act in 1970. DOE and its predecessors have had a public information program in place for over 30 years which generates products describing its activities, mainly in research and development and energy sources and conservation. Of course, the Secretary of Energy has emphasized an "openness" in conducting its programs.

Several offices within DOE have active public participation and institutional programs. Two offices receiving national attention as they develop sites and systems to transport, store, and dispose of radioactive waste, are the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) and the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP). Congress is emphasizing the need for public involvement by mandating such in its legislation, particularly the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, as amended in 1987.

The TMD within the Office of Environmental Restoration and Waste Management provides coordination and assistance to DOE programs in the movement of radioactive, hazardous, and other materials including the development and engineering of radioactive material packaging and transportation systems. TMD has made a strong commitment to information exchange as part of its Departmentwide transportation support role. There are two active programs involving the public. The Information and Communications program develops products and services for the public and for DOE and contractors to use when interacting with the public. The Institutional program fosters interface and liaison with interested parties, in all levels of government, with other agencies as well as the identification and resolution of issues.

TMD's Information and Communications Program receives feedback from the public through direct phone calls and during meetings and conferences, through correspondence and the media, other surveys, and studies. In

the past, program direction was often based on intuition and informal channels for feedback. Plans are underway to enhance this feedback with direct solicitation of the public's concerns in conjunction with an evaluation program. This task will systematically identify issues and audiences, evaluate the existing products in relation to the issues and audiences, then determine where future resources and efforts need to be focused. Additionally, a valuable source of feedback is through the Institutional Program which has established dialogues with state and local government organizations.

In 1988 and 1989, emergency preparedness emerged as a major transportation issue. TMD has recently focused much of its effort toward addressing this topic through printed products, and a film and a telecourse for first responders. Other products and activities are under development.

The Information and Communications program provides products to support DOE and contractor traffic personnel in training, giving presentations, and responding to public inquiries. Every effort is made to make them eye-catching, appealing, and easy to read no matter who the audience. Products and services are developed with four principles in mind: simplicity, directness, appropriateness and anticipation of needs. Distribution plans involve new methods of reaching people who may not otherwise find out about radioactive materials transportation.

#### PRINTED PRODUCTS

Printed products include a booklet answering general questions on radioactive materials transportation, a booklet providing a more detailed explanation of the DOE shipping program, and 16 factsheets on various topics. A Transportation Information Resource Manual has been developed and contains a compilation of helpful information for use by DOE and contractors in responding to inquiries from the public. It contains information on transportation basics, quantity limits and packaging, emergency response, HRCQ shipments, training, slides/films/videos available for loan, copies of factsheets, and a references section. This product is revised and updated annually. A visual resource collection of slides and color transparencies has been produced for DOE personnel and is revised annually. Duplicate sets of the Visual Resource Collection are available for loan. This collection is revised annually. The TMD Summary Report is being developed to introduce new employees, carriers and others to the Division's activities.

Future products either under consideration or development include a public information booklet addressing DOE's emergency response capabilities to transportation incidents involving radioactive materials, a student information program and an orientation and information kit

relevant to a particular conference or shipping campaign.

#### OTHER MEDIA

Two colorful, eye-catching, portable exhibits, entitled, "Transporting Radioactive Material...Did You Know...?" and "TRANSCOM" have been developed for conferences and other public spaces. Several films for the public and for training of DOE and contractor personnel have been produced on the topics of highway shipment of spent fuel, transportation of radioactive and other hazardous materials, and emergency response to a rail incident. The exhibit and the films are available for loan.

Under development is a full-scale mockup of a spent fuel cask. In the past showing the public an actual cask has been quite effective. However, costs and the need to use the actual cask has limited its availability. A lighter but realistic cask will provide a model dedicated to public information purposes. The model will have the added feature of cutaways showing the spent fuel or high level waste payload. Also under development is a film on what a first responder should do if they're first on the scene of a radioactive material transportation accident.

Future activities will include models and demonstration equipment to assist trainers and DOE personnel involved in public speaking.

#### OTHER SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

A major part of TMD's activities is responding to questions and requests for information on a wide variety of transportation-related subjects. A transportation information resource center was set up to help TMD access, interpret, and distribute transportation information. This resource center can also provide assistance to others in obtaining hard-to-find documents on transportation and packaging subjects.

The Information and Communications Program also sponsors special informational activities. An example is a telecourse broadcast in the summer of 1989 in cooperation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) on first response to transportation emergencies involving radioactive materials. The broadcast was seen by approximately 100,000 fire, emergency response, enforcement, and public service personnel on FEMA's Emergency Educational Network. It received the first place award for "Best Distance Learning Program in the Area of Continuing Education" at the 8th Annual Telecon Awards Ceremony during the recent Telecon IX Exposition. This is the world's largest conference and trade show on the use of video communication by corporations, government agencies, and educators. Features of the DOE/FEMA/DOT telecourse included a learning exercise and viewer call-in opportunities. Another

telecouse is under consideration for Fall of 1990.

Other outreach services under consideration include a media presentation to be used by DOE transportation and public affairs personnel, a traveling public speaking program using the exhibits, mockup and other products, and a speakers bureau of experts. A speakers bureau can be a very useful tool as it uses the people who are actually doing the packaging, shipping, and transporting. They are generally enthusiastic about their work and don't have a slick public relations stigma which can interfere with the dialogue.

### CONCLUSION

The Information and Communications program has taken an assertive stance and made a commitment to provide information on radioactive materials transportation through a combination of products and services that are available now and more that are under development. In

conjunction with the Institutional Program, TMD is moving ahead in establishing and maintaining a dialogue with interested and affected parties supported by a variety of products and services of its Information and Communications program.

We must have a strong commitment to public information and a viable dialogue because without public acceptance our ability to operate becomes jeopardized. It is well to remember that we live in a democracy and conducting shipping campaigns behind closed doors is no longer an option.

There is a good transportation story to tell with an impressive safety record. It needs to be told in a variety of ways, to a variety of audiences. We need to use every person involved in this industry and all available resources.