

ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION IN WISCONSIN

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ABSTRACT

Wisconsin's Radioactive Waste Review Board is required by law to advocate for and educate the public on the high-level nuclear waste issue. The goal of its education program is to empower people by giving them information and skills. Environmental advocacy and public activism are part of the State's Progressive political tradition. The Board seeks and uses public input while developing education programs, and helps local areas organize committees to develop their own programs. Looking at Nuclear Waste: The View from Wisconsin, the Board's slide show, will be screened following this presentation.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Wisconsin Radioactive Waste Review Board's education program is to give people the information and skills they need, so they can participate and advocate for themselves during the high-level nuclear waste repository siting process.

Wisconsin is one of seven states proposed for area phase investigation by the U. S. Department of Energy for the crystalline repository. The Wisconsin Legislature created the Radioactive Waste Review Board in 1981 to officially represent the state in all dealings with DOE and other federal agencies, to advocate for the best interests of Wisconsin's public, to educate and inform the public, and to encourage public participation during the siting process.

The challenge is to be both an advocate and a credible educator. Advocacy requires protecting one's interests, but education requires a balanced point of view. These goals are not always compatible.

Due to uncertainties about the safety of untested technology and widespread public opposition, the Radioactive Waste Review Board, as advocate, opposes siting a repository in Wisconsin.

The Board attempts to be DOE's responsible opponent by reviewing all repository program documents. The Board points out flaws in the proposed program, and suggests improvements. The Board publicizes problems it sees, and encourages people to learn the issues and participate in constructive technical review. As a result of comments from Wisconsin and other states, we believe DOE's repository siting process is beginning to improve.

As educator, the Board develops factual materials that are reviewed by technical experts. These materials acknowledge the political, economic and scientific controversy about high-level waste disposal. The Board is straight-forward about its position, and it refers people to environmental groups, utilities and DOE for a variety of viewpoints. The programs have succeeded in reaching

many people and encouraging them to participate, but many say the Board must continue to expand its education program and be a more active advocate.

The Board has other critics. The State's largest newspaper, the Milwaukee Journal, has taken the Board and the Governor to task for "NIMBYism" (Not in my BackYard).¹ Some outspoken citizens accuse the Board of colluding with DOE; others merely say the Board does not hit hard enough.

Wisconsin's tradition of environmental advocacy and public activism is essential background for understanding the people and their approach to environmental questions.

WISCONSIN'S PROGRESSIVE TRADITION

The Review Board's advocacy for the public interest is part of a tradition stretching back to the Progressive Era² from the 1890s through the 1920s. The "Wisconsin Idea," espoused by Robert M. LaFollette, is open, accessible government serving the best interest of the people. Today Wisconsin's Open Records Law and Open Meetings Law continue this tradition by ensuring accountability and public participation in government.

Many of the State's political attitudes and traditions were established during the Progressive Era. The University of Wisconsin extended to every corner of the state -- with agriculture and economic development technology. Today, the University of Wisconsin County Extension Agents work closely with local governments and provide education on environmental and development issues. They have formed affected area committees with local governments and citizen groups to deal with the high-level waste issue.

State Regulation

Another enduring Progressive legacy is Wisconsin's strong commitment to state regulation of industry -- a response to corporate abuses and pollution caused by robber baron industrialists of the early 20th century.

Railroads and electric power generators were regulated early on by the Public Service Commission. Wisconsin's 1975 Power Plant Siting Law, with its 20 year advance planning requirements, is a model for state regulation of electric utilities. The advance planning regulations were the basis of the state moratorium on constructing nuclear power plants in the late 1970s.³ State agencies also aggressively regulate non-nuclear energy plants and non-energy industries.

Wisconsin's Conservation Ethic and the Development of Nuclear Power

Because rural Wisconsin depends on its clean environment for agriculture and tourism, the state has a strong conservation ethic. Today there are about 270 environmental groups and 600 conservation clubs in Wisconsin⁴--many of which are in or near the 1,100 square-mile proposed potentially acceptable site in the Wolf River Batholith, or the 170 square-mile proposed candidate area in the Puritan Batholith.

Nuclear power was widely accepted, because in the 1960s, Wisconsin saw that acid rain and other pollution problems resulted from burning fossil fuels. Nuclear power was considered clean and economical. Wisconsin now has four reactors at three plants. The Kewaunee and Point Beach I and II reactors have good safety and economic records by national standards.

Until 1978, Wisconsin was generally pro-nuclear, but in 1979, public opinion took a dive from which it has not recovered.⁵ What happened?

Wisconsin's Attitude Toward Nuclear Power Sours

In the late 1970s, the popular media used the Freedom of Information Act to disclose the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's suppression of information about the risks of atomic power and atmospheric weapons tests. The Three Mile Island accident caused many people in the state, including the pro-nuclear Governor, to reconsider nuclear energy.

Other events between 1978 and 1980 included:

- ° Major steam generator problems at Point Beach I and II.
- ° Public opposition to uranium prospecting and mining in Northern Wisconsin.
- ° Popular support for nuclear arms control and fear of weapons proliferation.
- ° Madison's The Progressive publishes formula to build a nuclear bomb.
- ° Citizen group links high cancer rates and birth defects to low-level radiation from atomic fallout and nuclear reactors in northern Wisconsin.⁶
- ° Public opposition and grass roots organizing against plans for three more nuclear plants.
- ° Widespread opposition to the U.S. Navy's decision to locate an extremely low frequency (Project ELF) transmitter in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's Attitudes Toward a Nuclear Waste Repository

In 1979, just after the near-meltdown at Three Mile Island, DOE sponsored two reports on nuclear waste disposal without notifying the State of its research, as promised in 1977:

- ° A draft environmental impact statement⁷ used a hypothetical location in Wisconsin or Minnesota's crystalline bedrock as a reference high-level waste repository site.
- ° DOE's subcontractor, Dames and Moore, prepared a preliminary draft report rating granite in seven Wisconsin counties most favorable for study for radioactive waste site suitability.⁸ The State had to file a Freedom of Information Act request to obtain the report. The Governor and the public were outraged, because of DOE's unwillingness to share information with the State.

DOE's apparent bad faith prompted Wisconsin to develop its own review and education program. It also angered citizens and encouraged them to oppose "the dump." The following actions were taken:

- ° In 1980, the State hired consultant Dr. John Kelly of the University of New Hampshire, to survey the public about radioactive waste disposal. His results showed 54 percent did not believe the federal government is concerned with what local citizens think. Only six percent considered the federal government to be the most reliable source of information on the subject. Eighty percent thought the State government should be able to prevent construction of a repository. Fifty-three percent said they would move away from their communities, if a nuclear waste site were constructed without their approval.⁹
- ° In 1980, several large meetings opposing a waste disposal site were held near areas named in the Dames and Moore report.
- ° In 1983, 89 percent voted in a statewide referendum against siting a nuclear waste disposal in Wisconsin.
- ° In 1983, the Radioactive Waste Review Board went on record opposing a deep geological disposal site in Wisconsin, because of technical uncertainties and widespread public antipathy.
- ° In 1984, the Legislature prohibited licenses for new nuclear plants until solution of safety and waste-disposal problems.
- ° On January 16, 1986, Governor Anthony Earl said: "We will marshal all our forces to resist a nuclear waste disposal site in Wisconsin." The Governor continued, "DOE must prove it can design, construct and operate a safe repository. I don't see how they can do it in the near future."

On January 29, 1986, 2,500 residents attended a public meeting with DOE representatives. Six county board resolutions, and petitions with 1,776 signatures were submitted; 266 citizens questioned and commented. Only one public speaker trusted DOE's waste disposal program.

Radioactive Waste Review Board Structure

The Legislature created a ten member Board in 1981 that consists of six appointed citizens, and four government representatives, including the chair of both advisory councils.

The Policy Advisory Council has 11 citizen members representing local governments, citizen groups, a public utility and one Indian tribe. At least half the members must be from northern Wisconsin. This citizen council advises the Board on policy issues. The Technical Advisory Council has representatives from ten relevant state agencies, and two public members. It advises the Board on technical issues, and reviews and comments on all DOE program studies. Vacancies on the Board and Councils will probably be filled by people from the affected area.

The Education Committee is comprised of members from Board and councils. It helps the staff plan and develop education programs. An executive director, a policy analyst, an office manager and two education coordinators make up the Review Board staff.

The northern education coordinator maintains an office and library near the affected area. She works with local governments, community and environmental groups, and local media. She travels throughout the area with an informative display, and has visited about 150 schools, local governments and organizations.

As the Madison education coordinator, I edit our newsletter, design literature searches, organize conferences, and develop education materials and programs.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Assessing Public Information Needs

Our first step in developing the education program was to identify the public and discover what it wanted to know. We identified many audiences: interested citizens, local government officials, farmers, tourist businesses, educators, environmentalists, public interest groups, realtors, media and other organizations. The list continues to grow.

The northern education coordinator and the Policy Advisory Council work with these groups to learn their needs and concerns, which I then incorporate into education materials.

Distributing Information

The Radioactive Waste Review Board actively encourages public attendance and participation at its meetings by mailing announcements to more than 3,000 people and 450 media contacts. The Board holds many meetings in the affected areas, and considers public comments before making decisions. A frequent request is to hold more evening or weekend meetings.

Public and university libraries receive all pertinent documents and working papers. The Board issues frequent press releases. In January, Board and staff gave about 70 media interviews.

In January and February, the two Board offices received about 180 written and telephone requests per week. Many were on the new toll-free line. The Board may soon open more offices and technical libraries in the affected areas.

Education Materials

The centerpiece of our education program is a 20 minute slide show, Looking At Nuclear Waste: The View From Wisconsin. Members of the Education Committee, Wisconsin's Geological Survey, and the Board's Technical Advisory Council and staff advised me while writing and producing the show.

It was a challenge to work with diverse interests on the Education Committee, which included both a utility nuclear engineer and an environmentalist who had organized against the proposed Tyrone reactor. While the engineer was never completely satisfied, her influence aided the program's accuracy and balance. The environmentalist said the program was too mild, but his influence also shows.

The northern coordinator, with her direct knowledge of public concerns, such as background of nuclear waste and economics of nuclear power, also influenced the script.

Many graphics were borrowed from Battelle Memorial Institute, the Sierra Club and state agencies. I consulted with scientists to develop visuals for the slide show, which took about 5 full months to produce and cost about \$3,000.

After a month of public screenings, we revised the slide show, because people said it moved too fast and covered too much ground. Our lesson was that we should have sought more public input during production.

We circulate 20 copies of the slide show to schools, local governments and organizations. The northern coordinator uses the show as part of her presentation to about twelve schools and groups per month. Six libraries and organizations have bought copies. Sixty-eight secondary schools, nine colleges, 17 organizations, five local governments and eight other possible host states have borrowed the slide show since January 1985. Many borrowers show the program several times.

Evaluation forms go out with each show; about 2,000 people have responded. The show receives consistently high ratings for clarity, but there is more varied response to "Does the program give a balanced point of view?". About two-thirds say yes. A handful of the remaining third write comments -- half calling the program too soft on DOE, the other half, too tough.

The Board has also prepared two brochures and six fact sheets. The groundwater fact sheet is on its third printing, with more than 6,000 copies distributed in seven months. Other educational materials are the Board's technical comments on DOE documents, testimony on the Price-Anderson Act, correspondence and working documents. Because of Wisconsin's Open Records Law, the public and media have complete access to the Board's files.

Improving Education Programs Through Increased Public Participation

An elaborate plan to increase public involvement in planning programs for the area phase began with the North Central Regional Conference on High-Level Nuclear Waste, in September, 1985, in Superior, Wisconsin. The Review Board sponsored the conference with cooperation from Minnesota and Michigan. The purpose of the conference was to encourage regional cooperation, and to learn from citizens, local governments and tribes how the states could best serve the public. Small groups met at the end of the conference to make practical and creative suggestions. These ideas now guide our education program.

The Board used these suggestions in two discussion papers at three meetings in the affected areas during February, 1986. One paper suggests topics for education programs; the other lists options for local involvement. The Board offered these options as a starting point for people to modify, as needed.

Education ideas include:

- ° Fact sheets on a variety of topics
- ° Workshops to build media and community organizing skills
- ° A Speakers Bureau
- ° Curriculum and materials development
- ° Publications
- ° Audiovisual productions
- ° Local library data bank networks.

Local participation options include:

- ° "Affected area committees" to represent local concerns
- ° Independent local technical review of DOE field work and studies
- ° Review Board funds for affected area committees
- ° Area representation on Board and councils
- ° Local legislation and ordinances

Attendance at the three meetings averaged about 400 people. The public repeatedly challenged the Board to oppose further production of nuclear waste. Some people suggested the Board start baseline health studies before exploratory drilling, and improve distribution of educational materials.

As a result of these meetings, preliminary committees have been established to represent each area, and to conduct technical review and develop education programs. The Board will help these committees however it can, including funding.

The Board is now in the process of decentralizing education programs on the high-level waste program. More materials will be produced by local areas to meet local needs. The State will

produce programs of interest to the whole State and to schools. The State will coordinate with all local and statewide programs on the nuclear waste.

Future Education Plans

Curriculum development is our top priority. We are preparing a special issue and teacher's guide on high-level waste disposal for the September issue of the State Natural Resources Magazine. These will serve as a focus for workshops at next fall's teacher conventions. The State Departments of Public Instruction and Natural Resources will help us coordinate and distribute curriculum materials. To achieve technical accuracy and objectivity, the material will undergo peer review.

The slide show will be updated when the Area Recommendation Report is finalized. A video production and a statewide conference are planned for 1987. Three workshops in 1986 will focus on topics selected by area committees. We will also produce ten fact sheets -- six of which will be selected by local committees.

The educational materials have thus far been aimed at the general public and high school students. As times goes on, and the public learns more, we will produce more sophisticated material.

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