

EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION IN THE U.S. CIVILIAN RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The civilian radioactive waste management program in the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has many constituents with whom it interacts. Among these constituents are governmental entities at all political levels, public and private interest groups, and formal and informal review bodies, including the general public. As the waste-management program evolves, the nature of these interactions will also evolve. The degree of involvement by interested parties will be closely linked to the stages of program development that most directly correspond with their interests. The Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) within DOE understands that not all constituents are equally interested in its activities. Consequently, it has tried to structure its communication channels so that interactions with external groups are based on each entity's statutory and regulatory responsibilities, level and types of expertise, level of interest in the program, and the degree to which their involvement may fulfill the needs of both the external party and the waste-management program.

Over the last decade, there have been hundreds of opportunities for program managers and constituents to exchange information and ideas. Three typical kinds of interactions are Information Sharing and Feedback, Technical Assistance, and Program Review. OCRWM also plans to expand opportunities for external party participation.

INFORMATION SHARING AND FEEDBACK

Probably the most common type of interaction, in terms of both number of occasions and number of constituents involved, is basic information sharing. These types of exchanges have taken many forms over the life of the program—beginning with the public briefings and hearings held to discuss major program documents. Today, we are pursuing a variety of mechanisms to better inform our constituents of program plans and activities and to listen to their concerns.

Through a series of cooperative agreements, OCRWM has developed relationships with the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL), the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), and the League of Women Voters. Each of these organizations has provided opportunities for OCRWM to present information about the waste-management program and to hear from the organizations about their members' views. Through joint workshops and conferences, OCRWM personnel are able to meet the group members, discuss program plans and issues, and develop cooperative ventures. For example, the OCRWM Director regularly addresses the annual conventions of both the NCSL and the NCAI. In addition, both the NCSL and the NCAI offer topical seminars periodically on selected aspects of the high-level waste program. For example, the NCSL met in December to discuss implications of the Hazardous Materials Transportation Uniform Safety Act of 1990 on the future shipment of radioactive waste. In January, the NCAI sponsored a two-day workshop on radioactive waste for those Native American Indian leaders concerned with storage, shipment, or disposal issues that could affect their constituents. The League of Women Voters has conducted workshops on high-level waste issues

and pilot-tested curricula for the program's educational project. An additional effort planned to be undertaken by the League under a cooperative agreement with OCRWM is the updating and expansion of its 1985 booklet, "The Nuclear Waste Primer: A Handbook for Citizens."

OCRWM is currently also engaged in a variety of public interactions, principally with the general public in the three counties and eight communities in the region around Yucca Mountain, Nevada. Semi-annual Project Update Meetings at which the repository project is discussed are held throughout the State of Nevada. These meetings are widely publicized through the news media and contacts with State and local officials and community leaders. OCRWM operates two community information offices in Nevada, conducts site tours, and provides speakers and exhibits to many local meetings and events. OCRWM responds to all requests for information, participates in briefings, meetings, and workshops for, or open to, the public, distributes publications and information materials, and is involved in education efforts with the local schools. OCRWM has also held formal public hearings, and provides for review of, and responds to public comments on, key program documents and issues.

Other related activities include interactions with educators in the development of curricula material, posters, computer games, and workshops for elementary and secondary students; cooperative agreements with the University of Nevada System, and the OCRWM Fellowship Program, which supports 20 students at 18 universities in academic areas relevant to radioactive waste management. OCRWM also interacts with members of scientific and

engineering societies by providing speakers, papers, and exhibits at their meetings and conferences.

Recently OCRWM invited affected and interested parties to two workshops designed to afford opportunities for these parties to provide input regarding strategic principles for the waste-management program. A document titled "Discussion Draft on Strategic Principles for Planning and Decisionmaking in the Civilian Radioactive Waste Management Program" was prepared to provide a basis for discussion. At the first workshop, held in December of last year, the OCRWM Director committed to hold a third workshop in order to provide the participants with feedback regarding the impact the workshop discussions had on subsequent development of the Mission Plan Amendment and program implementation. That workshop is scheduled for next month.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Several external organizations with experience and expertise in areas of interest to OCRWM provide technical assistance to program development, in addition to providing information-sharing mechanisms. Several such groups are involved in the transportation element of the waste-management program. For example, OCRWM has a cooperative agreement with the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA), a professional organization of police and vehicle safety inspectors from 46 States and 10 Canadian Provinces. The CVSA has worked to establish a system of uniform inspection methods and standards for commercial motor vehicles and to promote reciprocal recognition of inspections among the member States and Provinces. The cooperative agreement between CVSA and OCRWM establishes a role and provides resources for CVSA participation in the drafting of proposed uniform inspection standards for highway shipments of radioactive materials across State lines without constantly being reinspected by various States that have different vehicle inspection standards.

The Council of Radiation Control Program Directors, representing the radiation safety offices of all 50 States, also has a cooperative agreement with OCRWM. Under the agreement, this organization will coordinate with CVSA for the review of the radiation-safety portion of proposed inspection standards and review State emergency-response and radiation safety programs and responsibilities.

OCRWM also has an agreement with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). The membership of AASHTO represents all 50 State offices with authority to regulate overweight truck shipments. A Task Force established by OCRWM and AASHTO reviews State permitting procedures and requirements and develops criteria for uniform permitting. The Task Force membership includes State transportation

officials from AASHTO's four geographic regions and representatives from the Department of Energy and the Federal Highway Administration.

PROGRAM REVIEW

A third set of interactions involves external parties who provide programmatic review and recommendations. Entities such as the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) provide an independent look at specific elements of the high-level waste program. The DOE has a continuing cooperative relationship with the NAS under which the Academy reviews the Department's high-level waste and defense programs. An additional perspective is obtained by virtue of the NAS' involvement with other Federal agencies with whom OCRWM may share common scientific problems or issues. For example, a recent research project by the National Research Council of the NAS on the subject of risk communication was jointly sponsored by private industry, trade associations, the Department of Energy, the Department of Defense, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Science Foundation.

In July 1990, the National Research Council's Board on Radioactive Waste Management published a position statement titled "Rethinking High-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal." The statement is based upon a 1988 conference attended by physical scientists, engineers, political scientists, and other experts familiar with issues related to radioactive waste disposal. The report recommends a number of actions to not only the Department of Energy, but also to the Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The NAS also conducted a symposium in September 1990 to examine the status of repository licensing requirements in the United States and elsewhere. The symposium featured critiques of the U.S. approach by the DOE, the NRC, the EPA, the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, and other interested parties, including states and environmental interest groups, and considered approaches to reconciliation of divergent viewpoints.

Another organization that provides program review is the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board (Board). Congress created the Board to evaluate the scientific and technical validity of activities undertaken by the waste-management program. The Board is charged with evaluating the DOE's characterization of Yucca Mountain, Nevada as a potential location for a repository for the permanent disposal of high-level radioactive waste. The Board also evaluates activities relating to the packaging and transportation of such waste. The Board fulfills its role through discussions and briefings by OCRWM and others, review of relevant program documents and related litera-

ture, participation in field trips, and attendance at technical conferences and workshops.

Twice a year the Board is required to submit a report of its findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the Congress and the Secretary of Energy. The Board is also called upon to present testimony to the Congress regarding its opinions on the progress of the program. To date, the major areas of the Board's activity have included: structural geology, geoengineering, hydrogeology, geochemistry, engineered barriers, transportation and systems, environmental and public health, and risk and performance analysis. In Fall 1990, the Board also conducted a series of public hearings on the possible environmental and public health effects of site characterization, repository development and operation, and on transportation issues. Through these hearings, the Board encourages a variety of persons and groups who are interested in the waste-management program to express their concerns.

EXPANDING EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION

The organizations mentioned in this paper are only a few of the many important groups with which DOE has cultivated productive working relationships. Each set of

interactions, although different in type and intensity, adds to the information the program has about the needs and interests of its constituents. This information, assistance, and advice can contribute to better and more informed decisionmaking on the part of program managers. In turn, when the program's constituents can observe the effect that their contributions have on program policy choices, they are more likely to develop confidence in the agency's ability to manage and implement the waste-management program.

One of the messages OCRWM has received from these interactions is that still more organizations exist that may have an interest in certain aspects of the waste-management program. Some of these entities include national organizations, such as, labor and trade unions, environmental and public interest groups, trade associations, scientific and technical societies, and state and local interest groups. OCRWM is currently working with DOE's Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs staff to identify organizations with a potential interest in radioactive waste storage, transportation, or disposal and to consider additional opportunities to expand participation in the waste-management program.