

**HAZARDOUS WASTE MANAGEMENT:
THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

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ABSTRACT

The journalists are crucial for informing and education of general public about facts related to hazardous and radioactive waste management. Radio programs, TV and newspapers are daily reporting on relevant facts and news.

In general, it is true that the majority of journalists are interested more in so called daily politics than in educating general public on certain technical or scientific topics. Therefore, hazardous and radioactive waste management was introduced to Croatian general public in last ten years mainly through various news on site selection of radioactive waste disposal facilities and some problems related to hazardous waste management.

This paper presents APO's experience with journalists in last ten years includes program and activities referring informing and educating of journalists from all media. The first example describes a very good and close co-operation APO has established with journalists.

The second example describes how it is difficult to realize full co-operation particularly with those journalists who would like to make sensational news on matters regarding management of hazardous and radioactive waste.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of sustainable development includes the obligation to manage hazardous and radioactive waste in such a way that it makes no problems to the coming generations. However, things are not so simple and clear when the realization of this idea is attempted. There seems to be acceptable solution for radioactive waste disposal, though technical and financial aspects are relatively. The main problem is public acceptance.

Croatia has neither hazardous nor radioactive waste facilities, nor arranged landfills, only 4 of 700 landfills in Croatia have a proper licence. It is estimated that 6,720.000 t of waste is annually generated in Croatia, 3.181.000 of it are industrial waste, and a greater part of it is hazardous waste. We are obliged to find a solution for this waste. Croatia ought to find solution to dispose not only radioactive waste generated on its own territory, i.e. waste derived from diverse medical, industrial and scientific nuclear

application which does not exceed some 50 cubic meters in total. It is also obliged to find acceptable solutions for disposal of a half of total radioactive waste accumulating in the Krško NPP that is situated in Slovenia, but represents a joint venture facility of both countries, Slovenia and Croatia. Therefore, one of essential duties of the APO Ltd. is the performance of these activities in Croatia.

APO Ltd is a consulting and engineering company, specialized in environmental protection with a focus on hazardous and radioactive waste management.

APO is founded in July 1991 under the name: "Croatian Radwaste Management Agency" by Croatian Power Utility, based on the decision of the Croatian Government. APO was instituted in order to set forth establishing of modern radioactive and hazardous waste management system in Croatia. In June 1993 the name was changed to APO Ltd.

One of the main tasks of APO is to constitute a system for radioactive waste management. The storage need for low-level and intermediate waste result not only for an obligation to resolve the problem of waste produced by years of utilization of radioactive matters and sources in our country, but also half of total quantity of radioactive waste created by the Krško NPP. Quantities of radioactive waste created in Croatia to date originate to diferent forms of application – such as in medical treatment, in industry agriculture and research institutes. In additions to those sources there are the exhausted sources of ionizing radiation, such as smoke alarms and radioactive lighting rods. APO's activities related to radioactive waste management can be divided in two groups: activities linked to the selections of s suitable lpcation and constructions of repository for radioactive waste, and other activities involving radioactive waste management.

The hazardous and radioactive waste disposal facilities belong to the so-called "controversial facilities": although the public can theoretically accept them as environmental protection related facilities, everyone refuses the siting of such a facility in his vicinity ("NIMBY effect"). As it is known, this attitude of the public, which represents one of the most decisive factors in the entire radioactive waste management policy, has been derived from both the lack of information and doubts about available given information. In order to solve the problem, the activities of all participants involved in the hazardous and radioactive waste management (e.g. citizens, companies, scientific institutions, authorities, ecological groups and institutions) should be open to public. All these participants should be involved in programs, which will enable them to make respectable decisions. But public confidence cannot be acquired without impartial and honest information.

In the system of informing the general public, the role of journalists is one of the most important. This is the reason why APO has given special attention to journalists by providing them information and offering them continuous education, from its establishment. APO also has established a good and fruitful cooperation with journalists, taking care for their knowledge and needs.

JOURNALIST INFORMATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Journalist information and education programme includes these activities:

1. Press conferences
All current APO projects of interest are presented to the public through press conferences, TV-programmes, discussions with journalists, expert's debates interviews, etc. We have made every effort to ensure that every relevant project, every step in our activities, are accessible to the general public through the public media. All employees are always ready to give relevant information to the journalists respecting our slogan "no question must remain without an appropriate answer".
2. Visit for journalist to facilities of interest in Croatia and abroad aimed at getting acquainted with relevant experiences and practices in the world
APO has organized numerous visits to facilities for waste handling and storage and waste dumps in other countries and Croatia for journalist covering such problems. During the site selection process repository for low-and intermediate radioactive waste in the Republic of Croatia we visited El Cabal and Ocelot, low-and intermediate radioactive waste repositories in Spain and Finland. After return to Croatia a lot of reports appeared in newspapers, on radio and national broadcast describing the work of visited facilities, paying special attention to its safety. These journalists have joined to parliamentary debates related to site selection and have given full support to our proposal for location. Besides visits to low-and intermediate radioactive waste repositories, we paid visits along with the journalists, to hazardous waste incineration plants, hazardous waste disposal facilities, conferences of interest for us and journalists, international fairs, etc.
3. Press clipping
APO makes weekly Press clipping with articles related to hazardous and radioactive waste, environmental protections, energy and ecology. Clipping is being prepared in 50 copies and 20 of them are distributed to journalists. Analyses have shown that such way of communication with journalists is very useful, because they can be finding a lot of interesting themes for their work in it. This refers specially to young journalist's beginners searching for their theme. The number of clipping user is permanently increasing.
4. Publishing activities
Publishing material is intended for general public to raise awareness and knowledge. To date, 13 books and other relevant publications have been issued
In October 1993 APO initiated the publications of the APO bulletin. The Bulletin a be-monthly publication, present the activities and the most important events within APO. Special editions occasionally accompany APO Bulletins. Each issue has a central theme; usually it is report of a finished project presented to the public in this manner. These bulletins and publications are distributed free. The journalists use them for their everyday work serving them as background for articles and for higher education.
5. Production of educational and promotional videos
All the more prominent APO projects are presented through the medium of videocassettes distributed free of charge, particularly to schools. Many journalists of

TV use our materials serving them as the background for the explanation of a particular theme. For example, video "Site Selection Process in Croatia" was used several times in talk show performances.

6. APO's web page on Internet
APO has been running its own web page on the Internet since 1998. It has become a very useful tool for informing of journalists. Pictures and other materials on web page have become available to all interested. This way of communication is developing on a daily basis and making APO a modern agency.
7. Permanent contacts and discussions
APO is open to journalists. For the group of journalist who are permanently following our work and activities we organize traditional Christmas dinner. We also often meet at lunch or dinner to communicate in an informal atmosphere. Such meetings are very useful and benefit for both, the journalist and APO, because they contribute to building trust and friendship.
8. Founding of state annual awards for the best journalist in the field of environmental protection.
In cooperation with Croatian Association of Journalist, in 1999 an award was founded for the best journalist article in the field of environmental protection. The award Degenia Velebitica, comprises a plaque, a diploma and a certain sum of money, and awarded annually on 22 April the Day of Planet Earth. In 1999 the award covered all categories, but since 2000 it has been awarded for the best journalistic work in three categories: radio, television and print. From its beginning, it has become a prestigious award. All media publish the names of journalists who got the award, articles are re-printing and broadcasts are being repeated. Every year more and more journalists are being nominated for the award. So far, a total of seven journalists received awards.

All these activities are intended for better informing and education of journalists but also for better relation and communication with journalists. Results of our work are visible and are of help to APO in informing the general public and building confidence of the public in our engagement and involvement.

THE FIRST EXAMPLE

In our activities performed so far there are many examples of good co-operation with journalists of all media, but I would like to point out this one. In 1999, our Parliament Discussed about the Program of land use of the Republic of Croatia. The Program has defined the preferential location for low-and intermediate radioactive waste disposal repository Trgovska gora. Many members of Parliament, especially those coming from that location were against the adoption of the Program. APO experts explained in the Parliament the site selection process. Journalists who were sitting in the Parliament and who have together with us, visited repositories in Spain and Finland and who have been well acquainted with our work, were our best representatives. They explained to the Parliament members that APO experts are people who are highly skilled persons in their discipline, that in other countries there are many safety repositories, too, and that they can have trust in our choice. It was our great help and

the Croatian Parliament adopted the Program which defined the preferential location, Trgovska gora, as the site on which a repository was to be built.

It is the confirmation that in the past ten years we have performed very good work and have managed to inform and educate the group of journalists who participate equally in decision making processes.

THE SECOND EXAMPLE

After the Program of land use of the Republic of Croatia was adopted, many non-governmental organizations, local communities were very much against the decision reached. At the same time, local elections were under way and the location for the repository for used as an instrument during pre-election campaign. Due to the question of repository, APO has again come in the center of journalists' interest. Every day we have had more than five interviews with all media representatives. Some of them have encountered this problem for the first time and we, as always, have offered them the full and correct information needed. However, some of them have shown the complete misunderstanding of the issue. The titles such as, "atomic Bomb on the Trgovska gora" or "French radioactive waste in Trgovska gora" have become the usual appearance. NGO's have organized the signing of petition for the protection of "a pure country Croatia" resulting from the import of foreign waste. If Croatia manages to build the repository; it will not be greater than 18 cubic meters because that quantity of waste was estimated in Nuclear Power Plant Krško, which is a special joint venture between Slovenia and Croatia. Having in mind the radioactive waste quantities generated in France and the capacity of repositories in France, it must be clear to everyone that more than 2 million cubic meters cannot hold in 18 cubic meters by any means. Having made known this fact for several time to the public and having shown that it was absurd, journalists who were writing about it did not want to accept the fact.

However, fortunately, many of them have commented by themselves these silly articles. Fortunately, after elections were finished, the story about radioactive waste was forgotten for a while. This fact points that the mass media is used for multipurpose aims.

CONCLUSION

As stated above, experts of APO are giving full attention to work with journalists. Journalists experts are the most enjoyable group to work with in this field, but it is very tiresome, but at the same time very useful to work with journalists willing to learn more about the hazardous and radioactive waste management. We are especially delighted with young journalists and we always find enough time for them. We have prepared publishing materials, videocassettes and web page for their information and education.

There are times when in spite of all our activities themes such as hazardous and radioactive waste becomes top themes not only because of them, but also due to political and relevant reasons. For example: local and state elections, parliamentary debates, or due to the international accident performed somewhere in the world. When this happens, the journalists, who otherwise do not deal them with, all of a sudden, are

becoming interested in them. At that time we should be ready to put additional effort in explaining and informing the general public. We must be ready to provide correct, honest and timely information.

It is easy to work with well-informed journalists, but it is very hard to deal with journalists who are looking for sensational news. Their information are usually without exact and checked data and without proper arguments. However, patience and skill of our experts contribute to solving even this problem.

APO is very much satisfied with the cooperation hitherto, so we may say that we won an ally in journalists or at least a part of them.

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