Observations and Lessons from OECD/NEA Activities in Stakeholder Involvement

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Social Aspects in the System of Radiological Protection

It is over a decade since the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (OECD/NEA) Committee on Radiation Protection and Public Health (CRPPH) published its first collective opinion paper entitled "Radiation Protection Today and Tomorrow" [1] in which it was significantly observed that the social dimension would play an increasing role in the work of radiation protection specialists. The growing expectation on the part of the public that it be more directly involved in decision-framing and decision-making has represented a clear challenge to the way in which such decisions have traditionally been taken. Consultation of authorities with interested parties has always been a part of the overall process of implementation and operation of technologies. However, the notion that a broad range of "stakeholders", many perhaps without expertise in the field in question, should be involved in decision-framing and decision-making has raised challenges that the CRPPH has found it important to be investigate.

The Villigen Workshops

The CRPPH set out to explore and address these questions through a series of workshops held in Villigen, Switzerland between 1998 and 2003. These three workshops progressively moved from an examination of the broad question of societal aspect of decision making in complex radiation situations, through a more focused consideration of how radiation protection may be better integrated in society, to an exploration of the processes and implications of stakeholder involvement in radiation protection decision making.

The First Villigen Workshop in 1998, entitled "The Societal Aspects of Decision Making in Complex Radiological Situations" [2] focused on the difficult question of contaminated areas and their restoration to a point where people could continue to live there. Key observations were that stakeholder involvement is a key emerging issue in the governance of risk, and that the radiological protection community must adapt to address these needs. The broad and important conclusion that emerged from the workshop was that the radiological protection needs to be integrated into societal decisions, rather than societal aspects being integrated into radiological protection decisions

This conclusion lead to the 2nd Villigen Workshop (2001), entitled "Better Integration of Radiation Protection in Modern Society" [3]. The workshop focused on sharing expertise in the areas of social trust, risk governance and decision-making, as well as practical experience from a range of national initiatives reflecting change in the way in which radiation protection policy is developed and implemented. Broad observations from the second workshop were that that

- there is a need to foster mutual trust between the radiological protection community and society as a whole
- stakeholder involvement may be the only approach to certain situations
- an understanding of roles and responsibilities of and by all stakeholders is essential
- stakeholder interaction approaches are needed that are sensitive to specific contexts but which share features of openness, inclusiveness and agreed procedures

In order to move towards practical guidance for stakeholder involvement in radiological protection decision making, the 3rd Villigen Workshop, entitled "Stakeholder Participation in Decision Making Involving Radiation - Exploring Processes and Implications" was held in 2003 [4]. Workshop discussions were based on three specific case studies with a view to identifying commonalities in stakeholder involvement processes and their possible implications. Significant practical guidance on stakeholder participation, assessing stakeholder participation and implications for the radiological protection community was derived from the workshop.

This series of three workshops have provided an important and practical contribution to the process of stakeholder involvement in radiological protection, and have shown that while all stakeholder involvement situations are unique in nature, and must balance internationally harmonised approaches and local specificity, many generic lessons are broadly applicable.

Practical Perspectives

A key result of the Villigen workshops suggests that when stakeholders are involved in radiological risk assessment and management, and science is brought to the service of "inclusive" decision-making processes, the resulting decisions can be of higher quality and greater sustainability than otherwise might have been the case. The CRPPH has continued the work initiated through the Villigen workshops with a further analysis of stakeholders and radiological protection based on the twenty years of experience following the Chernobyl accident, for which many of the issues identified have been experienced in practice. The results of this work are contained in the report "Stakeholders and Radiation Protection: Lessons from Chernobyl 20 Years After" [5].

The rehabilitation of contaminated lands and facilities often involves significant stakeholder concerns. Work to rebuild the lives of those living in the areas affected by the Chernobyl accident is a prime example of this, and while not all this experience is applicable to other circumstances in other countries, some important lessons emerged from the post-accident rehabilitation effort undertaken in some of the contaminated territories, including the value of a bottom-up approach to situation management, and the need for an adequately multi-disciplinary and scientifically sound approach, reflecting the complexity of the issue at hand.

A different but no less important practical example is that of the Information System on Occupational Exposure (ISOE) [6], launched by the OECD/NEA in 1992 with the objective of providing an international forum for radiation protection experts from utilities and national regulatory authorities to discuss and coordinate international co-operative undertakings for the radiological protection of nuclear power plants workers. ISOE is built on the recognition of the importance of information exchange amongst radiation protection professionals in nuclear power plants, as a contribution to the optimisation of worker protection globally. Current practice encourages and empowers workers themselves, as local stakeholders, to contribute significantly to optimisation of protection, broadly through work planning and management, of which the ISOE programme plays an important role. The ISOE programme itself is completing a process of soliciting feedback from users on how the system can best meet their needs towards the implementation of local radiation protection programmes.

Next Steps

The growing importance of stakeholder involvement in radiological protection decision-framing and decision making has affected the view of potential stakeholders, the role of the radiological protection professional in risk assessment and management, and the relative importance of case-specific circumstances in relation to harmonised, internationally accepted criteria. While the central importance of stakeholder involvement in addressing many risk situations is now widely accepted, the next step will be to optimise structures and processes to facilitate such participation. In this regard, the CRPPH has recently launched an initiative to address the

practical implications of stakeholder involvement in radiation protection organisational structures and initiatives through a review of specific existing practices and cases. This is being done with a view towards creating the conditions for a mutual assessment of situations and organisations which have made significant efforts to develop inclusive governance in their structures or initiatives, to develop proposals on stakeholder involvement in public radiological protection organisations, and to define further desirable steps to follow-up the development of these proposals and make a step forward in the learning process.

Conclusions

Over the past 15 years, a series of events and changes have somewhat shifted the focus of radiological protection, and will affect the future path taken by the profession in addressing radiological protection situations. Decision-making processes in complex situations are evolving to be more transparent and inclusive. The radiological protection community is also evolving to adapt to this new reality. Most decisions do not require broad, stakeholder consultation or participation, but some can only be addressed this way. Stakeholder participation can improve the acceptability and sustainability of decisions. The various initiatives undertaken by the OECD/NEA have increasingly revealed stakeholders as a integral part of radiological protection decision-framing and decision-making in a wide variety of situations. The CRPPH will continue to study how best to interpret these experiences and lessons, so as to most appropriately integrate radiological protection aspects into societal decisions.

References

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