



The role of the public informing on radioactive waste management

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Abstract: The aim of every public information programme is to build up confidence between the general public and those involved in waste management. Public information programme is the topic of this paper. The example of public informing is described in the programme of APO - Hazardous Waste Management Agency.

INTRODUCTION

Sociological and similar investigations of ecological and energy problems in Croatia and abroad have shown that almost all issues concerning hazardous waste especially radioactive waste are accepted distrustfully and doubtfully by the public. Therefore, it is essential how to promote the public as an active agent in decision making process related to waste management specially site selection of hazardous and radioactive waste disposal facilities.

The 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 radioactive waste management (e.g. citizens, companies, scientific institutions, authorities, ecologic groups and institutions) should be open to public. All these participants should be involved in programmes which will enable them to make respectable decisions. But public confidence cannot be acquired without impartial and honest information.

PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAMME

The aim of every public information programme is to build up confidence between the general public and those involved in waste management.

In order to achieve this it is necessary to plan in details the information programme. It is necessary to establish the objective, target groups, available resources, information media that should be used.

The Objective

It is important that the objective of the information is defined from the outset, and whenever possible also quantified, as this will have a major impact on the programme. A special programme is made for scientists, with more technical details, and a special programme is made for local population in a community to whom it is necessary to explain why a place in their neighborhood has been chosen for a repository. It does not make sense to present technical details and use scientific language. The following information activities include providing technical and scientific informations to the public, educating the public on the issue, keeping the public informed of the day-by-day activities and developments.

Target Groups

The general public is a large and very heterogeneous group of people. It is not possible to reach all individuals in one information campaign. It is therefore necessary to decide which sub-group in the general public to address with a specific information programme. The different groups to be considered include the following:

- individuals in a community
- national and local media
- opinion formers like journalists and teachers
- local officials
- scientific and professional organizations
- environmental activists
- relevant non-governmental organisations
- local organizations
- international community

Resources

No programme has unlimited resources. It is therefore necessary to optimize the programme to make the best use of limited resources. When allocating resources to a project the sum should be in proportion to the importance of the objective of the programme.

Information Media

There are many tools available for public information. These include:

- publication
- advertising
- media relations
- films and videos
- exhibitions and visitor centres

Publications

The use of brochures, reports and other publications is the most widely used information tool.

Publications have many advantages. They can be adjusted to different target groups, the issue can be dealt with in some depth, they can include pictures and illustrations, they can be easily distributed, they can be used over a prolonged period and they can be relatively cheap.

When making a brochure it is important to carefully target the material and the scope should not be too wide. Different brochures should be prepared for different target groups. For the scientific community it is necessary to use technical language and to give technical and scientific details, while this should be avoided in brochure intended for members of general public. Also the terminology has to be different, as well as the way of writing and the use of illustrations.

When publications are produced it is equally important to have them distributed to the right people. Although it is often necessary to distribute a brochure to large number of people in the region, this should not be overdone. People who do not want to have the information will only be irritated if material is forced upon them. Ideally only those who would like to have or ask for the information should have it, but unfortunately there is no mechanism which makes a such distribution possible.

Advertising

The advertising is increasingly tool for spreading information. Its main advantage is that it is fully controlled by the advertiser and may reach a large number of individuals in a very short time. The disadvantages are that it is rather expensive, in some countries it is subject to restrictions (especially TV advertising) and many people do not consider advertisement to be very reliable information. Also the target group cannot be very specific.

There are many different media for advertisements, like national and local press, TV, radio, magazines and posters which all have different target groups. It is important to choose the optimal medium, not only because the price differs largely, but also because the information effect is dependent on the medium used.

Media Relations

The journalists are crucial to public information programmes. Radio, TV and newspapers are daily reporting news and facts and also comment to those. If a

journalist gets interested in a subject and is provided with the proper information he can be of great value. Special press information activities are therefore often used which can include press conferences, press statements, press releases, media discussions, special visits to selected places with journalist groups, etc.

Films and Videos

Films and videos can be very effective in conveying even rather complicated messages. Their advantage is that they can be entertaining, brief, and can be shown whenever requested. The disadvantage is that it is extremely expensive to produce a good film and normally the film can only be shown on exhibitions or similar places where a number of people is gathered and necessary technical facilities are available. It cannot reach the general public in the same way as a brochure.

Exhibitions and Visitor Centers

Today all large nuclear facilities have a permanent exhibitions in visitor centres (some adjacent to the facility) where everyone can be informed about their activities. This has proved to be very effective, since it not only informs the members of local community, but it also attracts delegations of different kinds and tourist groups. Exhibitions can also be arranged as travelling exhibitions in vehicles, as school exhibitions etc.

Programme Evaluation

The most widely accepted method of evaluation of a public information programme is through opinion research which analyzes the result and makes an assessment against the objective set for the programme. This is, however, a difficult task to perform and requires people which are experienced in opinion analysis. Other methods which are simpler and less sophisticated, are to evaluate press reports, published letters to editors, questions and comments by visitors etc.

Whatever method is used it is important to make an evaluation not only to see what effect a specific programme may have had, but perhaps most important, what has been wrong and what can be improved for the next information programme to achieve better use of the money and resources.

AN EXAMPLE OF INFORMATION PROGRAMME

As an example, I will give you details of the public information programme which is implemented by APO-Hazardous Waste Management Agency.

APO-Hazardous Waste Management Agency is established to organize and perform activities related to the hazardous waste management in the Republic of Croatia and to assist the governmental bodies in the implementation of the environmental protection policy.

APO was established on June 2nd 1993 as the result of the re-registration of the "Croatian Radwaste Management Agency" founded by Croatian Electric Power Industry on July 2nd 1991, following the proposal by the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

The APO - Hazardous Waste Management Agency has drafted and started the following modes of communications with the public:

- A. permanent co-operation with mass-media in order to give continuous, full, precise, timely and honest information to the public;
- B. well-organized research of public opinion related to environmental issues;
- C. various sponsorships referring to environmental protection;
- D. public participation in improving all activities of the Agency;
- E. building trust with environmental groups;
- F. close collaboration with respective scientific and research institutions and expert groups;

For this reason the APO started following activities;

- Issuing publications
- Issuing the bulletin "APO-News"
- Recording video tapes for public information and education
- Organizing conferences, round tables and lectures
- Tours for particular groups (experts, journalist) to facilities of interest in Croatia and abroad
- Sponsoring environmentally related project.
- Informing mass media about all relevant activities of APO.
- Establishment of Information (Visitor) Centre.

CONCLUSION

Building trust with the public is a very tiring and long term process which should be carefully planned and performed. Before we start with public information programme, we have to know the "general rules" accept and involve the public as legitimate partner, plan carefully and evaluate the performance, listen to your audience, be honest, frank and open, coordinate and collaborate with other credible sources, meet the needs of the media and speak clearly and with compassion.

World wide practices shows that public involvement in radioactive waste disposal facilities is treated as high-priority task. Although every single country creates its own programme of public participation in concerning issues, it is obvious that general methods and approaches to the programme implementation are basically same or similar.

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