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CASE-STUDY SESSION 1

Mass media and public information on nuclear energy and radiation: striving for two-way confidence and understanding

Introduction by session chairman Juhani Santaholma

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sufficient, correct and objective information is one of the key-issues in the nuclear dialogue. Surveys made in different countries show that the public requires more information - and in an understandable form - about nuclear energy and radiation. That is one of the reasons why the European Nuclear Society has a special Information Committee to study nuclear information questions and to organize dissemination of information to the public in the European member countries.

After the Transnuklear-case a year ago and other similar nuclear "news incidents" the ENS Information Committee carried out an assessment of public opinion and news media. As an introduction to our Case-Study Session, I shall present the conclusions of that assessment.

The ENS recognized fully the significant role of the news media in reflecting public opinion in the nuclear field. Although it was admitted that the news media in many cases have good reasons for reactions of negative character, the following impression could not be avoided:

- Many of the international nuclear "scandals", spread through international and national news channels, also have clearly political features.
- Bad news penetrates well - good news, however, remains too often unnoticed; and
- Scandals and bad news transcend national boundaries and echo easily and loudly internationally.

Therefore, it is worthwhile and important for the nuclear organizations to consider why unverified, even false, information appears so often in the news media.

The Information Committee felt that here there is also room for self criticism. Our Study emphasized that the nuclear organizations' relations with the news media are of prime significance. The reasons

for public information problems are often the wrong attitude or lack of information on the part of nuclear organizations.

Hence our Study came to the question whether something can be done and what can be done to rectify the situation?

In the conclusions of the Study, ENS emphasized that it is important for the nuclear sector to pursue an active and frank information policy with the news media. The main elements of such an information policy could be:

- 1 The nuclear press releases must be adjusted to the terms of news media. That is to say that nuclear news must respond to the same rules as any other news.

- 2 It is very important to exercise open reporting by the nuclear sector
 - by responsible directors and experts, for example utility directors, scientists and also responsible political leaders;
 - beforehand, if possible, and in any case always without delay;
 - in any event or incident that possibly has information value, the nuclear sector should not remain silent - silence is easily interpreted as a cover-up.

- 3 Nuclear experts and scientists should also actively participate in the debate. They should popularize the information wherever possible.

- 4 The information specialists of the nuclear organizations should promptly and actively find out the facts connected with the "news incidents" and report them quickly and openly to the media.

- 5 Providing detailed and objective background information via personal contacts between the nuclear sector representatives and news media and individual editors is of utmost importance. The attitude in such contacts should be respect of the news media work as a societal factor. News media are an important channel of information from the specialized organizations to the public.

6 In indisputable cases of incorrect information, the nuclear sector should react in public. We came to the conclusion that defence is not the only form of action.

In the above conclusions ENS recognized that it is our task to prepare and provide the news media and the public with prompt, correct and objective information. It is endless work but, at the same time, our only way of winning and maintaining credibility and confidence among the public.