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A Swedish Nuclear Fuel Facility and Public Acceptance

by

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1. THE ABB ATOM NUCLEAR FUEL FACILITY

For more than ten years the ABB Atom Nuclear Fuel Facility has gained a lot of public attention in Sweden. When the nuclear power debate was coming up in the middle of the seventies, the Nuclear Fuel Facility very soon became a spectacular object. It provided a possibility to bring factual information about nuclear power to the public. Today that public interest still exists.

For ABB Atom the Facility works as a tool of information activities in several ways, as a solid base for ABB Atom company presentations, but also as a very practical demonstration of the nuclear power technology to the public. This is valid especially to satisfy the local school demand for a real life object complementary to the theoretical nuclear technology education.

Beyond the fact that the Nuclear Fuel Facility is a very effective fuel production plant, it is not too wrong to see it as an important resource for education as well as a tool for improved public relations.

2. THE GROUPS OF INTEREST

The Nuclear Fuel Facility is subject to the attention from a lot of various groups in the society. Politicians, authorities, journalists and customers have all interest in how the facility is operated. For that reason it is important for the owner to carry out an impeccable performance.

Probably the most important part of the public groups are their local representatives, not to forget employees of ABB Atom. The local interest is mainly concentrated on two things. First, how is the Nuclear Fuel Facility supposed to affect the surrounding environment? Second, how will it develop as a significant local employer?

To answer these questions and to satisfy the information demand of the public groups is very important. That will give the company goodwill, but also provide a base for the work of creating a public confidence to the nuclear power technology as such.

3. WHAT ARE THE PUBLIC ISSUES

The information demand of the various groups is very complex. The customers' need to know that ABB Atom, also in the future, can provide qualified technical competence and reliable supplies, is quite obvious. In the same way, the information demand of the nuclear authorities is very well defined. Rules and regulations clearly point out what is to be followed up. We talk about regulations of environmental impacts from releases of uranium or chemicals to air or water, but we also talk about labours radiation protection and uranium safeguards. In addition to this the authorities require administrative information on uranium transportation or information needed to support issuance of necessary import/export-licences.

For the rational operation of the Nuclear Fuel Facility it is very important, that all these items of information can be provided in an acceptable manner. If the relations to authorities doesn't run smoothly there is always a risk that this is observed by the media with a negative coverage as a consequence.

Regarding the information request of the public groups mentioned above, the view is more complicated. Two different groups of interest can be identified.

- First, people honestly interested in the facility operation and the environmental impact of it.
- Second, people who want to use criticism of the facility as a tool to discredit the nuclear power technology in general in order to stop the use of it.

To the first group we can count people, adults as well as medium level and high level students, with a diffuse knowledge of nuclear power technology and its way of operation. The local representatives of this group are mostly interested in convincing themselves that the facility creates no danger to the surroundings. But they are, of course, also interested in the possibility to ask the specialists of the facility if "nuclear power is dangerous or not". A very frequent question is what will happen to the highlevel nuclear waste.

People of the second group pick up their basic information from sources within the antinuclear movement. Most communication with these people is devoted to counteraction or correction of their messages and opinions. It is, however, a mission impossible to change the opinion of this group. Even with persistent information it is almost impossible to influence the position to nuclear power of antinuclear people. Here we also have had to handle the international cooperation within their organisations, especially regarding uranium transportation.

4. HOW TO REACH THE PUBLIC

The base for the information work of ABB Atom is a wide openness towards everyone who is interested in the activities of the company. That work also has to be characterized by honesty, good timing and accesability.

In spite of this the most important base for the public relations work is an impellable performance of the company and the Nuclear Fuel Facility. If legitimate criticism can be payed to the facility operations, goodwill is lost. And a big lot of communication work is required to recover it, if ever possible.

Every available possibility to distribute information regarding the Nuclear Fuel Facility is used. To keep the public's view of the Nuclear Fuel Facility up to date, we provide regular contacts with local media. We also provide information to groups of visitors at the Nuclear Fuel Facility or we give external lectures to college classes or various associations, on their invitation.

In addition, there have since two years been organized semiannual meetings devoted to inform local politicians about the Nuclear Fuel Facility operations. The conferences have been carried out in cooperation with the Swedish nuclear authorities. There is no doubt about the contribution to the trustful relations between the company and the society gained from these meetings.

Every time, the program of the meeting with the politicians has been repeated in a public meeting. The public interest has, however, decreased step by step. Today the public meetings have developed to be some kind of tribunal for a small number of antinuclear people who try to nail nuclear business and nuclear authorities to the wall with one local reporter as the only audience. The issues presented from the floor, more and more tend to take up subjects other than those regarding the Nuclear Fuel Facility operations.

5. INFORMATION ACTIVITIES AT THE NUCLEAR FUEL FACILITY

The information work directly connected to the Nuclear Fuel Facility is concentrated on visitors service. The public interest of the facility is still very extensive, despite it has been open to visitors for many years. ABB Atom can count for 1000 - 2000 visitors annually. Visits for purpose of study by local college classes are very popular and make a great part of the visitors. The youngsters are important visitors with respect to the long run opinion of the facility.

To the visitors we also count for groups coming from associations, political and others. The members of these groups very often have a social position giving them opportunities to bring the information further to other people.

An ordinary visitors program include a brief oral company presentation together with some basics on nuclear power technology, and guided tours through the workshops of the facility. The tours make it possible for the visitors to have direct contact with the personell of the facility. As the guides to a great extent are technicians or foremen from the workshops, this contribute to the visitors confidence. They get an opportunity to meet "ordinary working people" and are not only taken care of by "public relation professionals".

The employees of the Nuclear Fuel Facility also have an other important task in acting as "ambassadors" for the facility towards the public. That role requires a solid knowledge about the company and the facility operation. For this, and other reasons, ABB Atom recognizes internal information as a very important task. For several years there has been provided a personell paper, internal newsletters and regular internal information meetings.

Occasionally open-house activities have been organized in addition to the regular visitors service. The employees, their families and their relatives were invited to those, very popular activities. It is no doubt about the positive contribution to the

public goodwill of the Nuclear Fuel Facility, gained from the open-house activities.

Yet another possibility for goodwill creation is provided by the fact that ABB Atom has opened the Nuclear Fuel Facility for the IAEA nuclear inspector training courses. These courses has now been carried out during the last five years, leading to a special award was given to the company this year for "outstanding contribution to Safeguard Inspector Training". The IAEA submittal of the award was noted by the local media, and added one more piece of goodwill to the public opinion of the Nuclear Fuel Facility.

6. WHAT HAS BEEN GAINED BY INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

By openness, honesty and accesability in the public relation work ABB Atom has founded public confidence in the Nuclear Fuel Facility and in the company operations in total. Extensive dispatch of information to people living in the region has lowered the uncertainty and the anxiety about the nuclear power technology. This is well illustrated by the low nuclear power public resistance in the region compared to the average of Sweden.

That can not, however, be interpreted as a capitulation by the antinuclear movement. But they have a hard run because of the regional common public opinion. This is well illustrated by the local reaction on a wide spread demonstration against a uranium transport to the Nuclear Fuel Facility. The campaign was going on all around the Swedish coast and a lot of people from many places in Sweden was recruited for action in the harbour of Västerås. To all this a local leading antinuclear representative told the news media: "This is nothing to argue about".

An open mind to public communication also means that unfavourable news has to be communicated. This is a hard task that makes heavy demands on the timing of the communication. Openess and honesty give mostly, however, a more permanent impression than a temporary disadvantage because of a piece of bad news. With a proper timing, even bad news might put strength in the goodwill of the company.

Still, the solid base for the public confidens of the Nuclear Fuel Facility is an impellable performance. In the long run, the best tools for creating public acceptance to the nuclear power technology is to show qualified operation and environmental careness. Public communication never will make up for bad operating performance or unqualified plant safety.