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PUBLIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES IN RADWASTE MANAGEMENT: THE SPANISH APPROACH

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1. INTRODUCTION

ENRESA (Empresa Nacional de Residuos Radiactivos, S.A.), is a State-owned company, founded in 1984 and is responsible for radioactive waste management in Spain.

ENRESA's activities are carried out in accordance with a General Radioactive Waste Plan approved by the Spanish Government.

In Spain, as in most countries, the public is concerned about many of the activities involving radioactivity or radwaste management; this concern arises for different reasons, being one of them the lack of information on the matter. This situation often leads to an information misuse by certain politicians, green groups and media, which can increase the distrust of the public to responsible companies and institutions. At the root of both these problems there is also a lack of political consensus regarding projects and related activities. To gain public acceptance, it is necessary to develop a long-term information policy since, in the field of communication, results can only be achieved in the long term.

ENRESA is carrying out an on-going Communication Plan (CP), implemented successfully in the areas surrounding a low and intermediate level waste disposal site and a 500 Mw nuclear power station (Vandellós I) which is currently being dismantled. Implementation of this plan at national level is being accomplished stepwise.

This document deals with the most relevant issues relating to the radioactive waste situation in Spain and with the efforts made in communications.

2. RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT IN SPAIN

The Spanish Nuclear Power capacity amounts to 7.3 GWe, this implying a volume of some 200,000 m³ of low and intermediate level wastes (LILW), including wastes from the decommissioning of all the country's nuclear power plants to level 3, and 6,700 tm of heavy metal in the form of spent nuclear fuel.

A repository LLW/ILW became operational in October 1992, following awarding of the necessary license. The facility is of the near surface type with engineered barriers. Concrete is used as immobilisation matrix. The facility is capable of housing all the wastes to be generated in Spain until the 2nd decade of next century. The facility is located at El Cabril (Córdoba) on an old, 1,200 Ha uranium mining site which was used for the disposal of radioactive wastes in the 60's, in a disused uranium mine.

3. PUBLIC PERCEPTION

„Issues are not what they really are, but what they seem to be“ . This phrase is generally applicable to public opinion world-wide, and Spain is no exception.

The general public has scarce information on either radwaste management or on activities relating to radioactivity.

Over the last few years, anti-nuclear groups have adopted a general strategy designed to combat any activity carried out by ENRESA, the aim being to prevent waste management and, ultimately, to force the closure of the NPP s.

There are three important facts that influence public opinion:

- Any action carried out by green groups.
- Some political parties use radwaste management issues against the parties in power, at national, regional and local level.
- The sensationalist news media use radwaste management without any technical or scientific basis, presenting the risks as being higher than they really are.

In addition, people are usually frightened by anything relating to radioactivity, including natural radioactivity.

At the local level at which ENRESA carries out its work, the communication plan has been applied and the situation is reasonably quiet despite which, minor opposition still comes from some minority groups.

4. ENRESAS' S COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC INFORMATION PLAN

The CP includes a number of different actions aimed at providing information to the general public. The main actions performed may be summarised as follows:

- Visits to Information Centres or facilities. ENRESA has built five information centres, one at El Cabril, one at Andújar (where an uranium mill was dismantled), one at Madrid Headquarters, one is a mobile centre presently placed at Vandellós site, and the fifth is located in the city of Córdoba. ENRESA receives 25.000 visitors a year. These centres provide comprehensive information on radioactive waste management.
- Supply of information to specialists journalist, politicians and other opinion leaders, at local and national level. This includes visits to facilities abroad.
- Organisation of courses on radwaste management for teachers, doctors, politicians, journalist, etc., at local and national level.
- Sponsorship of information events and special publications (seminars, courses, journals, magazines, etc.), educational support, etc. ENRESA sponsors associations of high prestige, such as the Red Cross, WWF, etc.
- Edition of three magazines at national and local level: these publications have a circulation of 7.000 copies, and are sent to publics of interest.

- Other editions: these are mainly books on radioactive waste management and brochures on general and topical matters relating to ENRESA's activities.
- Videotapes: Videotapes are used at the information centres to explain different items. There are also other videotapes on specific topics and research and development projects.
- Socio-economics issues: This section includes the following actions:
 - Studies on the socio-economic situation of the areas surrounding the sites.
 - Cooperation with Local Administrations with a view to optimising the resources generated by ENRESA.
 - Training programmes for people working on site. Identification of local companies and services, in order to use them during the building and operation of the facilities.

In addition, in December 1989 the Ministry of Industry and Energy, issued an Order granting a certain economic compensations to communities located around waste storage or disposal sites, depending on the distance, population, category and volume of the wastes considered.

Public relations. In this field, the following activities are being carried out:

- Periodic personal contacts and information to opinion leaders (political, economical, etc.)
- Meetings with local authorities from the areas surrounding the sites, on a yearly basis.

5. RESULTS

From the very beginning the situation regarding public opinion was one of clear opposition. At regional level, and particularly in the area surrounding the El Cabril site, both the general public and the opinion leaders were opposed to any action by ENRESA. This opposition included some anti-ENRESA demonstrations right in front of the main entrance to El Cabril. At national level politicians, journalists, etc., did not show much confidence in ENRESA's activities, and the information published in the newspapers was always negative. The CP was applied right from the start, and after some time public perception began to improve little by little.

The CP having now been applied for ten years, the situation is currently follows as:

- At regional level, the general public visiting the El Cabril facilities show confidence as regards ENRESA's activities because they see first hand the function of the plant during the visit. After the visit they feel that the work is performed professionally and carefully.

Most opinion leaders, such as politicians, teachers, etc., have received information, courses, etc., from ENRESA and they now respect the work carried out by ENRESA.

Finally, all interested journalists receive all the information they need directly from ENRESA. Nowadays, the information they receive about ENRESA is generally verified with ENRESA spokesmen. They frequently visit the El Cabril facilities, and sometimes facilities abroad. All the above allowed ENRESA to obtain the necessary licenses for El Cabril.

- At national level, ENRESA has gained the respect from both politicians and journalists. This does not mean that they would support any kind of work to be performed by ENRESA, such as siting of a HLW repository, but nowadays it is becoming unusual to find newspaper articles on ENRESA that are not based on facts.

The degree of skill achieved by ENRESA shows that with the support of the Administration, as has been the case to date, and by informing the public and their opinion leaders, it is possible to achieve objectives in radioactive waste management.