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## **Transition from site selection to site confirmation phase: New challenge to Posiva's communication and public involvement**

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### **Introduction**

In Finland, Posiva Oy is responsible for the final disposal of spent nuclear fuel. In the 1990's investigations have been carried out on four intended sites for final disposal. Posiva implemented Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on the investigation sites in 1997-1999. The results of the EIA procedure were published in the EIA report which was attached to the application filed to the Government in May 1999 for a policy decision on the construction of the final disposal facility in Olkiluoto in the municipality of Eurajoki.

In December 2000, the Finnish Government made a favourable policy decision ("Decision in Principle") on the construction of final disposal facility for spent nuclear fuel in Olkiluoto. According to the decision, the facility is in line with the overall good of the society.

According to the Government's decision the prerequisites of the policy decision had been met. The municipality of Eurajoki supported the construction of the facility in Olkiluoto and STUK, the Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority, also approved of the advancement of the project.

The positive policy decision of the Government will still need to be ratified by the Parliament. The parliamentary proceedings of the policy decision will probably start in February 2001.

The policy decision will make it possible for Posiva to concentrate the future site confirmation studies in Olkiluoto, Eurajoki, and construct an underground research facility there. The excavation of the research facility in the bedrock is planned to start in a few years' time. The construction of the final disposal facility is scheduled to start after the year 2010.

The transition from the site selection to the site confirmation phase in Eurajoki means a new challenge not only to Posiva's research work but also to Posiva's communication. In addition to meeting the safety criteria, Posiva's activities shall in the future also meet all the criteria specified by the surrounding society.

### **Evaluation of communication**

As Posiva is facing a new situation in transition from nation-wide communication to local level interaction, new tools and ideas for communication are needed. For this reason Posiva conducted a study to find methods for enhancing proactivity and accuracy of communication in Eurajoki and in the neighbouring municipalities. The results and the recommendations of the study are dealt with in this presentation.

The material of the study consisted of the comments and opinions received from Eurajoki and its neighbouring municipalities and also from nation-wide discussions concerning the project. All documented statements and opinions and newspaper articles related to the subject during the EIA procedure and the policy decision making process were studied and analysed. Furthermore, research reports concerning nuclear waste management and communication were also reviewed. The study

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covered both Finnish and foreign experiences gained from communication and public involvement in connection with hazardous projects.

### **Some observations on Posiva's communication**

According to the study, the following remarks are true concerning Posiva's communication:

- People wanted more practical and more concrete information about the safety of the project - more common sense grounds for safety are needed.
- Public events and discussion groups during the EIA-process were considered effective tools for communication and interaction. In addition, thanks to public involvement in the EIA –process, the opponents did not have all the floor to themselves.
- Nation-wide communication and interaction was considered to be non-existent during the program phase of the EIA-procedure. Although advertising campaigns were implemented, they were not connected with the EIA-process going on at the same time.
- Communication and interaction was limited to the actual municipalities included in the site characterisation program and the neighbouring municipalities felt they did not receive sufficient information on the project.
- Opponents considered Posiva's communication strategy efficient in keeping argumentation local and separate in the investigated municipalities.
- A further need for intensive communication and interaction in the future was brought up in the EIA - statements given by authorities.
- Both the EIA-program and the EIA-report were considered to be illustrative, understandable and informative. They served as tools for communication, as well.
- The nuclear waste management exhibition built in a spent fuel transport vessel "Sigyn" worked well for communication purposes. SKB's vessel visited Finland three times, the last time docking right in the centre of Helsinki. The waste simulator built in a transportable steel container where public could see a scaled-down model of a waste disposal facility, was also considered informative.
- People wished Posiva's web site to be more interactive.
- Visits from the site investigation municipalities to the Olkiluoto power plant facility formed an important part of communication with people getting acquainted with the spent fuel in a concrete manner.
- Information did not reach young people and women as well it should have.
- Opponents considered Posiva's communication to underestimate public opinion; Posiva declared to have the only relevant information and opinion concerning final disposal. This refers to the advertising campaign in 1998, where the message was: *"not everyone has to be highly precise with their facts. We must."* The campaign was said to have given an inconsistent picture from Posiva and the Ministry of the Environment considered that the campaign did not promote interaction and discussion in a way intended in the EIA law.

### **How to communicate in Eurajoki?**

After the Finnish Parliament has ratified the policy decision, Posiva will soon move to Eurajoki to begin the construction of the underground research facility. This will also mean that Posiva's communication refocuses from nation wide discussion on local interaction.

Local people expect Posiva to be able to offer employment and income opportunities to the inhabitants of Eurajoki. As a recognised expert organisation, Posiva will also have to take part in other aspects of the municipal life, e.g. through various associations. Posiva will have to support the civic projects under way in the municipality, both financially and in spirit. Posiva's personnel play an important role in municipal

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participation. It is in Posiva's interests to ensure that the inhabitants of Eurajoki will find Posiva's influence on the everyday life of the municipality positive.

Although 60 % of the inhabitants of Eurajoki approve of final disposal, some 30 % are against it. We must try to start an active dialogue with the opponents and Posiva must be prepared to also make allowances. The concerns and fears of the local people have to be listened to carefully and taken into consideration whenever possible. As mentioned earlier in this presentation, the safety issues of final disposal cannot be emphasised too much.

### **Neighbouring municipalities**

Based on the experiences during the EIA-process, it can be assumed that the possible opposition against Posiva's activities will probably arise from areas in close vicinity of the final disposal facility but outside the municipality. There is a very obvious reason for this. The neighbours may feel they will be affected by the possible negative aspects of final disposal, but will not gain anything from it. What would be the right course of action in this situation?

First of all, it is important to ensure that the final disposal investigations will not cause any inconvenience to the inhabitants of the surrounding areas. Secondly, Posiva has to proactively inform people about the company's activities in such a manner that things do not come as a surprise to the inhabitants of the neighbouring municipalities. All kind of secrecy has to be avoided. Thirdly, Posiva must make efforts to establish co-operation networks also with the decision-makers and inhabitants of the neighbouring municipalities to gain approval also from them for the project.

### **Nation-wide communication is still needed**

Although Posiva's main focus in communication in the future will be on Eurajoki and the neighbouring municipalities, nation-wide communication cannot be given up entirely. In the long run there are many issues that can generate discussion and work against Posiva's research work in Eurajoki. For example, discussion on potential import of foreign nuclear waste (although it is prohibited in the law) or transportation of waste can make it more difficult for Posiva to obtain the construction licence for the final disposal facility. That is why it is important for Posiva to maintain and increase its confidence and credibility among general public. To be known also outside the municipality of Eurajoki, advertisement campaigns may be needed in the future too.