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Media – Our Friends (Improving our Relationship with Media)

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The paper will present the principles, goals and the steps followed in establishing media relationships. It will highlight the company's activity developed over this year within the Romanian Public Information Programme in the nuclear field, in order to establish friendly relationship with media, as well as the conclusions we have reached in performing such an activity.

A today modern society involves two keywords which our everyday life cannot ignore any longer: information and communication.

Most people want to be informed about different topics. And nuclear is a special one. This interest does not mean that they seek out information on these topics. We must offer them the information they need and the answer to their questions. We mustn't forget that the lack of information does not mean that people are ignorant. That means we didn't offer them enough information; we didn't find the proper way of communication.

The basic objective of communication in the nuclear field is to keep public informed about the facts on different aspects and events of nuclear field.

When developing a communication plan on specific issues, more elements are needed:

- a) to establish clear objectives;
- b) to identify the audience according to the objectives of the communication plan;
- c) to identify the message to be communicated and the channels of communication;
- d) to establish a management plan having clearly stated the goals for each audience that will help to achieve the objectives;
- e) to evaluate the results by establishing a plan to incorporate learnt lessons in future planning.

A plan of communication implies much information which different audiences perceive and understand, distinctly; each of them will have his own questions and requirements which determine the proper way of communication.

One of the main audience is the media which act as a watchdog by bringing issues to the public attention. Therefore, the media play a crucial role. By spreading information, they may also represent a channel of communication. But, the public vulnerability versus mass-media which, in their rush for sensational or lack of knowledge on the domain, many times launched simple, unfounded speculations. A good reporter is willing to listen to all the parties involved in an event. But this is not always the case, and some journalists are advocates of a particular point of view. We cannot ignore them. In many cases they present all sides of an issue as equal, without giving credit or paying attention to the scientific evidence. It is very important that media have quick access to information. Editors and publishers are also very influential in deciding what information is published and in deciding the balance of an article's content.

In establishing the relationships with media we have to take into account some specific elements: there are many young and unexperienced journalists and reporters, most of them having a humanistic formation and no elementary technical and economical knowledge.

In our relations with media we have appealed to basic, *general principles* governing any communication policy:

- *The respect for the public*, for their need of education and communication, as well as the trust in their capability of correctly perceiving the information;
- *Being aware of all the major interest problems and fears* of the public related to the nuclear program;
- *Ensuring a perfect openness.*

All the information necessary for a better understanding of a nuclear event, no matter how unpleasant it might be, should be available for the public.

- Being aware of, and *respecting the opponents' opinions*;
- *The quality and content of the messages.*

Communication means questions and answers. It should address the demands and fears of the public, the developments of the events. The tone, language and content are essential.

- *Initiative in information supply.*

It should be taken into account that, the lack of an initiative in supplying information, the correction of false information or just the subsequent penetration of correct information will be more difficult.

Beside all these, we have to point out several aspects that we have been trying and are still trying to take into consideration in our relationships with media:

- (a) That which makes an event for us does not always represent one for the press.
- (b) A journalist will always be interested in:
 - what is new
 - what is striking
 - what is significant
- (c) The laws governing the event:
 - event proximity
 - reader's delight
 - reader's culture level and interest
 - combination of circumstances
- (d) For a better collaboration with the press we need:
 - cultivating the relationships
 - simplicity
 - knowledge of being original

Having in mind all these considerations, in establishing the company's strategy related to the information and communication in the nuclear field, we have paid a special attention to the relationship with media.

The relationship with mass-media through:

- elaborating support documentation for radio and television programs;
- initiating some radio programs, quizzes, eventually live talking to the listeners;
- initiating some TV programs on various topics mutually set out with the programs editors;
- issuing press releases for a prompt information of the public related to some events occurred during the operation of the subsidiaries reporting to „Nuclearelectrica“ National Company – SA;

- adopting an „offensive“ attitude at the press level by publishing articles on Cernavoda NPP operation, reliability, safety, economic, ecological and social advantages, on radioactivity and so on, as well as interviewing scientific, medical personalities, specialists involved in the nuclear power program, Romanian operators, representatives of the nuclear regulatory body and so on;
- organizing initiating courses on nuclear power for media representatives.

The main actions:

The activity developed during 1999 has followed these points. Prompt press releases following the main events related to the Cernavoda NPP and interviews on different subject of interest in the central press have been issued.

Press conferences were organized on site and at the headquarters having as main topics hot subjects such as Cernavoda NPP-Unit 2 completion.

The initiating courses for journalist have started. They are carried out within the Training Center, at the Cernavoda Nuclear Power Plant for one day and consist of a technical presentation followed by a visit of the plant. The main subjects discussed are: a short story related to the history of nuclear energy, the history of the Cernavoda NPP, nuclear fission, nuclear power generation, CANDU type reactor presentation –safety aspects, technical and economical performance, waste management, radiation levels, INES and other aspects depending on the participants „requests“. The main result of this action was that we made a lot of new friends. A real „channel of communication“ between mass-media representatives and our company was created. They supported the company in some difficult moments including a correct presentation of the nuclear events which have occurred at the world level. Some of them even became members of the Romanian „Nuclear Energy“ Association. After the first courses, the main conclusion is that their interest, participation in the course, the level of understanding depends on their background. Many of them have expressed their desire to continue the course and many other subject of interest to be presented.

Recently we have started some Radio programs, consisting in very short programs so-called „nuclear radio pills“. In the near future a debate on attitude pro and con nuclear energy and the Cernavoda NPP are to be organized.

Also, TV round tables on different topics such as the Romanian nuclear program or the aspects related to the radwaste disposal were also organized.

In these moments, the way in which the public receives the real information has a great impact on the future development of this alternative and the role of media is an essential one. So, we consider that the utility mission is to act promptly to transmit to the public complete and honest information with the help of this important segment which is media.