

INTEGRATING STAKEHOLDERS' ISSUES AND CONCERNS INTO NIREX'S TECHNICAL RESEARCH

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Introduction

This note outlines some of the activities that Nirex has undertaken to try and integrate stakeholders' issues and concerns into the technical research we have undertaken and how we are attempting to address their issues. Nirex arranges a range of dialogue activities including workshops, meetings, interviews and focus groups with a wide range of stakeholders. These events are coordinated under what is called the Nirex Involvement Programme. The feedback and inputs we have received at these events have been used to influence the work that we undertake.

Nirex's interactions with stakeholders, particularly members of the public and local councillors in the aftermath of losing the 1997 rock characterisation facility public inquiry at Sellafield, has been fundamental to changing our whole approach. We are now trying to understand people's issues and recognising that Nirex is accountable to a wide constituency of stakeholders, but particularly the general public and their elected representatives. It has also enabled Nirex to attempt to integrate people's issues and concerns into its work programmes.

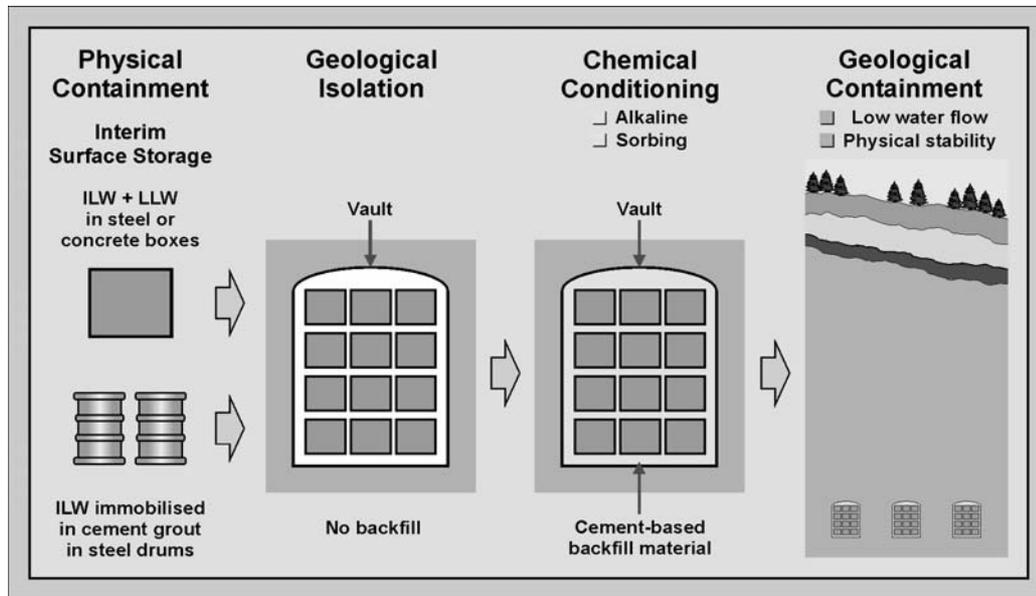
Specific examples of where stakeholders' issues have impacted on the technical work Nirex undertakes are outlined.

The Nirex Phased Disposal Concept

A practical example of how Nirex has incorporated stakeholders' issues is how the Nirex Disposal Concept has changed to become the Nirex **Phased** Disposal Concept. After previously resisting the introduction of retrievability, Nirex began to look at the issue following the RCF decision in 1997 and calls for work on the issue from stakeholders. Many members of the public, especially in Cumbria, had emphasised retrievability as an issue of great importance and this view has also emerged strongly in the international context. The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology [1] requested further information on the feasibility of monitoring and retrievability and the UK Centre for Economic and Environmental Development (UKCEED) consensus conference on radioactive waste management [2] also highlighted monitoring and retrievability as important issues. After developing work on monitoring and retrievability Nirex held three workshops [3,4,5] to obtain the views of stakeholders, including the public, to influence the development of a strategy for progressing the work. The workshops helped Nirex to develop its work programme for monitoring and

retrievability. Nirex responded to all those who participated in the first workshops in July 2001 [6] and Nirex has created a Report that addresses all the issues raised by participants at the third workshop.¹

Figure 1. The Nirex Phased Disposal Concept



Outcomes

The work has been integrated into what is now the Nirex **Phased** Disposal Concept, see Figure 1. This revised concept has been well received and includes a period of underground storage that allows monitoring and retrievability while future generations decide whether to proceed to sealing and closure. The whole exercise demonstrates the importance of listening to stakeholders and members of the public. It also shows that social issues can impact on technical work and vice versa.

Nirex internal inquiry

During meetings with Nirex various stakeholders made allegations about Nirex's behaviour and conduct in the years leading up to the public inquiry that started in 1995 to gain planning permission for the rock laboratory at Sellafield and the Secretary of State decision in 1997 to refuse the planning permission. In light of its Transparency Policy [7] Nirex undertook an Internal Inquiry, of its own volition, during 2000, into allegations made against the Company and published a report detailing the findings and lessons that can be learned for the future [8].

Although most of the allegations could not be substantiated, the Inquiry process did highlight a number of lessons that Nirex believes it must recognise and implement. The emphasis throughout the investigation was to try to look honestly at the past and to draw lessons for the future. The allegations

1. United Kingdom Nirex Limited, *Responses to Feedback Received at Follow-up Workshop on Monitoring and Retrievalability*, Nirex Report N/112, 2004.

centred on Nirex and in particular the conduct and reporting of its scientific programme, data and information and site selection issues.

Nirex staff members formed the Internal Inquiry team, which investigated the allegations. The Nirex Board appointed Lynda Warren, Professor of Environmental Law at the University of Wales and member of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee (RWMAC), as an external assessor. Advice was given by Guy Dehn, Director of 'Public Concern at Work' and legal advice was taken from Slaughter and May.

Outcomes

The report on the Nirex Internal Inquiry was published in July 2001, copies were placed in the House of Commons' and House of Lords' Libraries. Copies were sent to all those who participated in the Inquiry including those who had made complaints and to every member of the Board and to each member of Nirex's staff.

The Independent Assessor, Professor Lynda Warren, presented her findings on the Nirex Internal Inquiry to the Nirex Board.

Mechanisms have been put in place to address the recommendations made in the Inquiry Report.

The Company now endeavours to conduct its all its work in the most transparent way possible in line with its Transparency Policy [**Error! Bookmark not defined.**] and taking on board the lessons learned from the Inquiry.

An open door policy exists within Nirex and staff are encouraged to make any concerns known. Management makes time to listen and to follow up on any concerns raised. Questions submitted to the Company are rigorously answered. The Company Directorate meetings (monthly) now have an "Issues and Concerns" agenda item to maintain the visibility of issues raised and to ensure that staff are aware that their concerns (should they have any) are taken seriously and that there are means for dealing with them including provision of a formal response mechanism.

The published Inquiry Report received very positive feedback from the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), The Ends Report, general media, BBC Cumbria, ITV Border, BBC Radio 4 and one of the persons making an allegation which was successfully proven by the Inquiry Team.

The Inquiry and its findings have also influenced Nirex's Whistle Blowers' Policy, 'Raising and Sharing Concerns at Work' [9].

Developing answers to questions raised

Nirex commissioned two sets of focus groups to investigate what members of the public think about radioactive waste management [10,11]. Participants were specifically asked what they would like more information about with respect to radioactive waste management. They wanted to know various things, including:

- What is radioactivity?
- How much is there? How much has been produced in the past? In terms that people can understand.

- How is waste being handled now?
- What are the differences between the different classes of wastes, how much is there of each sort, what are their relative strengths; their temperature; their longevity; the method of containment?
- How long does radioactive waste last?
- What is the risk? How will it affect people's health?
- What are other countries doing?

Outcomes

Nirex is developing leaflets to address some of the questions raised in the discussion groups. The leaflets are aimed at members of the general public and have been designed to use a mixture of words and pictures to present the information. To test the leaflets discussion groups were undertaken with Nirex staff. So far leaflets have been developed on:

- What is radioactivity? [12]
- What are the wastes? [13]
- Options for long-term management [14]
- What are the other countries doing with their radioactive wastes? [15]
- What is the Nirex Phased Disposal Concept? [16]

The work also influenced the development of the Nirex brochure. [17]

The following initiatives are also being undertaken to answer stakeholders questions that have arisen from discussions:

- The questions that were raised in discussion groups on the Nirex Phased Disposal Concept [18] have been addressed by Nirex staff and a report has been written outlining the answers. [19]
- Questions raised during a citizens' panel on partitioning and transmutation [20] are being addressed by the expert witnesses who presented to the participants.
- A list of answers to frequently asked questions has been developed and is available on the Nirex website.

Issues, concerns and scenarios

Nirex has identified from its dialogues various issues and concerns that stakeholders have and scenarios that they would like to be considered in assessments of waste management options [21].

Safety is often held as the most important aspect of radioactive waste management, impacts on **health** and the **environment** were also mentioned in most consultations.

In many of the consultations **transport** was an important issue, and during some consultations people mentioned **ethical** and **social** issues, including the impact of waste management on future generations.

Another measure that seemed to be important to consultees is the ability to deal with unexpected events, accidents and technological developments. To enable this **monitoring** of and **accessibility** to the waste management facility are seen to be important. Some people want **mitigation measures** or **contingency plans** to be in place and **retrievability** is an important aspect. Some of the consultation participants wanted **flexibility** to be built into the waste management system to enable future generations to take advantage of technical developments and/or to be able to manage the waste differently.

People were also concerned about the process by which decisions are made and implemented. People were concerned about **openness**, **transparency** and the ability to **influence** the decision-making process. The **structure** of the industry and the **behaviour** of those involved are also important and need to be addressed.

Integrating the issues and concerns into Nirex's work

The outcomes of the dialogues have led Nirex to want to add social and ethical research as a specific research area alongside its traditional scientific and engineering research. Nirex is also undertaking work to integrate the outcomes of its stakeholder dialogue more fully into its assessment work. An internal review of the current Nirex assessments has been undertaken to determine which of the issues are already addressed, which can be addressed in the next set of assessments, and what work is required to do this.

Nirex is also developing a social and ethical assessment of the Nirex Phased Disposal Concept and other waste management options alongside its technical assessments. The social and ethical assessments provide preliminary evaluation of the options against social and ethical principles that have been raised in relation to radioactive waste management.

The issues raised with respect to decision making have been fed into our work in that area and the issues raised about organisational structure have impacted on discussions about making Nirex more independent from the nuclear industry, the issues raised about behaviour are influencing the way that Nirex undertakes its work.

Review of Nirex's performance

Nirex has several policies and documents in which it makes commitments about the way it will undertake its research, engage with stakeholders and allow them to influence and input into its work. Nirex commissioned Environmental Resources Management (ERM) to conduct a series of face to face interviews with representatives from different stakeholder groups. The aim of the interviews was to provide a snapshot of stakeholder views on Nirex's Mission Statement and Objectives [22], policies on Transparency [**Error! Bookmark not defined.**], Corporate Responsibility [23] and the Environment [24] and investigate how people felt Nirex was performing against its policies and statements.

The work first showed [25] that:

- A large majority of interviewees stated that Nirex's current ownership damages Nirex's credibility with many stakeholders and limits its ability to carry out its mission and specific activities, such as providing credible endorsement of packaging proposals.
- Many felt that a new independent organisation needs to be formed which retains Nirex's expertise but is set up in a different way.
- Nearly all interviewees felt that Nirex's mission was too constrained and should refer to radioactive waste management options rather than just disposal options.
- Almost all of those interviewed stated that the Mission should also be extended to cover high level radioactive waste and other radioactive materials, such as spent fuel, plutonium etc.
- There is strong support for the Transparency Policy, Environmental Policy and Corporate Responsibility Policy.
- There is widespread support for Nirex's increased focus on dialogue with stakeholders, and most interviewees commented that Nirex are fairly open and transparent.

Outcomes

The Nirex Board agreed in September 2001 to change the Nirex Mission; it is now:

"To provide the UK with safe, environmentally sound and publicly acceptable options for the long-term management of radioactive materials."

The membership of the Nirex Board is also being reviewed and the addition of more people who are not members of the nuclear industry is planned. The feedback has been used to develop Nirex's work programmes and has been used in our responses to Government consultations.

In July 2003, Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for the Environment, announced:

"The Government will consult Nirex shareholders on the best way of making Nirex independent of industry and under greater government control, and our aim is to establish and announce the appropriate way forward by autumn of this year." [26]

Nirex repeated the stakeholder review in 2002 [27] and 2003 [28] the results were similar to those obtained in the first stakeholder review and Nirex is looking at how to incorporate the findings into its work and the way it is undertaken.

Conclusions

Nirex has used, and will continue to use, a variety of dialogue techniques co-ordinated under the Nirex Involvement Programme to engage with stakeholders about the work we undertake. The dialogues we have undertaken have helped us to identify a wide range of issues that are of concern to stakeholders. We are now trying to address the issues, concerns, scenarios and questions raised in our work programme.

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