WORKING TO BUILD TRUST IN NUCLEAR WASTE REGULATION: Progress in Public Outreach



Janet P. Kotra, Ph.D. Division of HLW Repository Safety U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Pacific Basin Nuclear Conference March 25, 2004

Overview

Introduction
Involving the Public in Rulemaking
Need for a New Approach
Revised Expectations
Longer-term Changes
Results, so far

NRC's Mission Depends on Effective Communication

 NRC is an independent regulator responsible for protecting public health, safety and the environment
By law, NRC regulates the U.S. Department of Energy to assure safety of the potential repository at Yucca Mountain

NRC uses a public rulemaking process

Inviting Public Comment on New Regulations for Yucca Mountain

 NRC published proposed regulations for comment (February 1999)
Public Meetings in Nevada (March 1999)

- Local concerns not addressed
- NRC staff needed more and better preparation
- Initial meetings did not inspire confidence

The Challenge:

NRC's technical staff wants to explain agency actions and listen to public concerns but...

To do so, we often must explain complex technical and policy issues in a manner readily understood by the public

Different Communication Styles and Needs

Technical Staff typically

- Work with technical information
- Communicate with other experts
- Use detailed, intricate explanations

∠ Public generally

- May not understand technical details
- Have variety of questions and concerns
- Demand short, common sense explanations

What did NRC do to improve future meetings?

Identified lessons from initial meetings

Allowed staff more time to prepare

Designated a project manager

What else did NRC do?

Expert training in risk communication Revamped meeting format - Trained facilitator - Shorter, plain language presentations Addressed requested topics - Anticipated concerns and questions Frequent breaks for questions and dialog Prompt, formal meeting follow-up

How did NRC's HLW staff bring about these changes?

HLW Public Outreach Team

Revised NRC expectations of interactions with the public

Supported longer-term culture changes within NRC as a whole

HLW Public Outreach Team

Brings together technical and administrative professionals ∠ Meets regularly Defines clear messages Identifies key concepts for "plain language" translation" Crganizes preparation for public meetings Develops handouts and displays

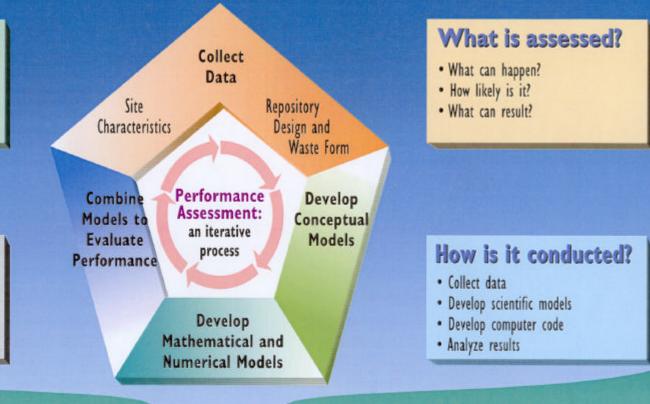
Performance Assessment: Part of Evaluating the Safety of a Proposed Repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada

What is Performance Assessment?

- Systematic analysis of what could happen at a repository
- · One of many NRC safety requirements

Why use it?

- · Complex system
- · Systematic way to evaluate data
- · Internationally accepted approach



NRC would require DOE's Performance Assessment to

- · Provide site and design data
- · Describe barriers that isolate waste
- · Evaluate features, events, and processes that affect safety
- · Provide technical basis for models and parameters
- · Account for variability and uncertainty
- · Evaluate results from alternative models

Revised NRC Expectations for Public Interactions

Improve common understanding of technical and policy topics

Enable a more meaningful dialogue

Explain, not persuade

Longer-term Changes

HLW Communication Plan

More Coordination Between NRC Offices

International Forums

Commitment of staff and resources

Agency-Wide Focus

Communication Plans

Task Force on External Communications

NRC Director of Communications

Agency "Guidelines for External Risk Communication" (NUREG/BR-0308) Results, so far, are encouraging New approach successful at 29 meetings

Positive feedback from local officials

Many informed comments from wide array of stakeholders on NRC proposals

Requests from public for more meetings