INFORMATION MATERIALS AND COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES OF ARAO

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ABSTRACT

ARAO is a public agency responsible for implementing all aspects of radioactive waste management. Its most important mission is certainly the siting of a repository for all low and intermediate level waste in Slovenia. ARAO carries out different communication and information activities to improve the public acceptability of such a facility among the general public, local community, public opinion makers and decision makers. These activities include running of the Visitors' Centre, publishing various informative publications on radioactivity and radiation, nuclear technology and radioactive waste management. ARAO also supports study circles and local information media, has its own web site and communicates with journalists working for Slovenian magazines, newspapers, TV and radio stations. Communication and information activities are assigned about 10 % of the yearly budget of the agency. Most of the finance is spent on running the Visitors' Centre and on publishing information materials for school children, youngsters and teachers. Information on radioactivity and on the work of ARAO provided by the agency is intended to increase the public interest in nuclear issues and to prepare the foundation for an informed and responsible decision on the radioactive waste repository in Slovenia. ARAO has also implemented direct communication, such as workshops, study circles and representations for the local community leadership, and these activities will be intensified in the near future.

1 INTRODUCTION

The right to know and the right to participate in decisions concerning the environmental issues is regarded as very important in the process of decision making on all projects that might have risky or hazardous impacts [1]. Public participation has been successfully introduced as a compulsory element of the procedure of the environmental impact assessment. In the case of the siting and licensing of the radioactive waste repository, the complete environmental impact assessment procedure is required before the license can be issued.

Slovenia is in the process of siting the low and intermediate level radioactive waste repository. The final solution has not yet been found, therefore the procedure of licensing together with the environmental impact assessment has not started yet. It was decided to implement the so-called combined procedure in the siting process, taking into the account the environmental and technical conditions as well as the public opinion and social acceptability. Communication with the public as early as possible is very important, especially with the local community on the potential sites for the repository. If strong public rejection occurred
very early in the process it would be almost impossible to continue the communication. ARAO supports and produces a continuous source of information in order to increase the general functional knowledge and understanding of phenomena connected with the radiation and nuclear technology. The final objective of these activities is to alleviate the potential conflicts between the public and the governmental interests in the field of radioactive waste management.

Because of the considerably small area of the country and very scattered population, and because of the opinion that radioactive waste represents a great risk and danger, Slovenian citizens feel they should have the opportunity to express their opinion about the location for the radioactive waste repository (Figure 1). The information and communication activities are therefore not focused on a specific local community, geographical area or social group, but rather on the whole population, using a variety of media.

\[\text{Who should make a final decision on the location of the LILW repository}\]

- professionals
- local community
- parliament
- all citizens on referendum
- government
- don't know

Figure 1: Public opinion poll in Slovenia showed that people mostly think that the public acceptability of the radioactive waste repository is very important.

2 COMMUNICATION APPROACHES

The communication activities stress two aspects of decision making:
- decisions depend on rational thinking and understanding, and objective knowledge is important,
- decisions depend on emotions and standpoints, and prejudices are important.

The basic objectives of information and communication activities are to promote the agency as the holder of radioactive waste management, and to increase the acceptability of the radioactive waste management facilities in Slovenia. The various methods of communication are meant to improve the recognition and credibility of information provided by ARAO.

To achieve the agency promotion, ARAO sponsors environmental and waste management publications that publish its logo and a short company profile. Each year ARAO publishes the annual report with non-technical information on its activities, its personnel, achievements and the financial report. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of ARAO an open round table discussion was organized, and information about ARAO work was presented in newspapers.

To increase the acceptability of nuclear facilities, including the radioactive waste repository in Slovenia, great efforts are made to give the correct information to the public. The basic concept of ARAO communication activities is that all materials are free of charge for anybody who shows an interest and asks for a publication. Most of our activities are focused on providing the basic information on the radioactivity, radiation and its...
environmental and health effects. Such a decision in our communication strategy takes into the account the results of international comparative studies on the functional literacy in European countries, which showed that most of the Slovenian adult population scored not more that the level 2 out of 5 [2]. Still, the target population is very variable, including children and young people in the formal education process, and adults of different age, social status and educational background.

2.1 Communication media for school population

The target population is teen-age pupils from elementary and secondary school. The young generation accepts the nuclear energy rather well because they do not have so many prejudices as the adults [3]. The main communication approach tries to increase the knowledge, and hence the rational component of decision making.

An important information source is the Visitors’ Centre located at the Milan Copic Nuclear Training Centre near the research reactor. Most of the visitors are primary and secondary school pupils. They can listen to a lecture, either on radioactive waste management or on the electricity production in the nuclear power plant. They can also see some experiments with radioactivity. The exhibition in the Visitors’ Centre, illustrating the story on radioactive materials, waste origin and disposal, comprises posters and models, computer games and self-tests (Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Models and posters in the Visitors’ Centre show what do the LILW repository looks like.](image)

ARAO publishes information materials that can be used as additional learning sources in the educational process, mainly in science classes (Figure 3). Leaflets, posters, CD-ROM, books, the yearly magazine and videotapes on radioactive waste management and general issues on radiation are available on request to individuals. One issue of each publication is sent free of charge to all primary and secondary schools and to public libraries. The educational material was also presented at the conference of Slovenian science teachers [4]. The publications are also available in the Visitors’ Centre.
2.2 Communication media for the adult population

ARAO communication channels address all groups of stakeholders. Communication strategies that provide two-way communication are preferred. But the educational materials that mainly provide information in one direction are also applied. Educational publications prepared for the secondary school population are also well accepted by the adults who wish to learn more about radioactivity and radioactive waste management and disposal. ARAO web pages are also an important source of information. The possibility of communicating with ARAO personnel is offered by the e-mail service. Supporting the local newspaper together with preparing articles on the radioactive waste management issues is an additional ARAO activity focused mainly on the adult population. ARAO also supports study circles engaged in radioactivity studies and discussion [5]. Special workshops and presentations are organized for local leadership, journalists and interested environmentalists. (Figure 4).

Figure 4: A workshop provides a stimulating environment for confronting of the opinions and achieving the agreements.

3 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

ARAO is aware that good communication is necessary in any siting and licensing of risky facilities such as a repository for radioactive waste. In the future, two-way communication methods and communication with the adult population as a part of the
decision making process will become more important. The communication activities will be concentrated in the localities having the natural potential for hosting a repository.

The institute of mediator that represents connection between public interests in local environmental protection and the governmental interests to safely dispose of the radioactive waste is already established. The mediator will continue to inform the local communities and to discuss all the conflict issues with the stakeholders on both sides. Work on study circles promotion, workshops and presentation for local leadership will be intensified.

ARAO will utilize the positive experience they have in other countries where a good communication strategy has shown to improve the acceptance of nuclear facilities and reduce the unnecessary fears stemming from ignorance and mistaken ideas. However, this foreign experience should be modified in Slovenia due to the quite specific social situation.

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REFERENCES


