

STUK's Communication with the Public and Final Disposal of Spent Nuclear Fuel

*Technical meeting on the Establishment of a
Radioactive Waste Management Organization:
Session 4: A common issue: Informing the public,
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Public communication, why STUK was involved

- Decision in Principle for SNF disposal in 2001
- Local public & decision makers have a strong legal position in decision making in Finland
- Study by Helsinki University for to clarify and understand what the local public & decision makers expected from STUK
- Knowledge on basic safety issues was low; common misbeliefs were such as:
 - largest portion of annual dose to Finn comes from radwaste
 - radiation from disposal depth is a major hazard for human above the ground
 - no walking, hunting, fishing, berry or mushroom picking is possible near disposal site
 - radwaste is much larger risk than operating nuclear power plants

Public communication, why STUK was involved (2)

- Public and decision makers found it difficult to get reliable information about disposal
- The information available was contradictory
- More than half of the locals considered STUK as reliable source of information
- One of the responsibilities of regulators in Finland is to promote informing the public, but no official obligations to do what STUK did: developed Communication strategy

STUK's Communication strategy

- Key audience: local public and local decision makers (communication not directed nationwide)
- Public communication with basic objectives:
 - to gain local public's and local decision makers confidence in the process (not public acceptance to disposal as such)
 - to support local decision makers by improving their factual knowledge base in safety issues
- Answer "stakeholders needs"
 - STUK's main stakeholders were/are local public and local decision makers of the municipalities where site investigations were carried out
 - study by Helsinki University gave STUK understanding which safety issues concern stakeholders and how they perceive risks behind their concerns

Study results - main expectations from STUK

More information was expected about everyday, above the ground, 1–100 years safety issues and problems

- safety of transport: routes, frequency of transports, consequences of traffic, accidents, possible needs for evacuations, terrorism
- safety of encapsulation facility: consequences of accidents, possible needs for evacuations, terrorism

STUK to take more active and visible role

- “referee”: state clearly which info is right and which is wrong
- provide the above info on safety matters, but note that people are tired to take and deepen themselves in complicated issues
- explain clearly what regulatory control is in practice; “what is there for me”

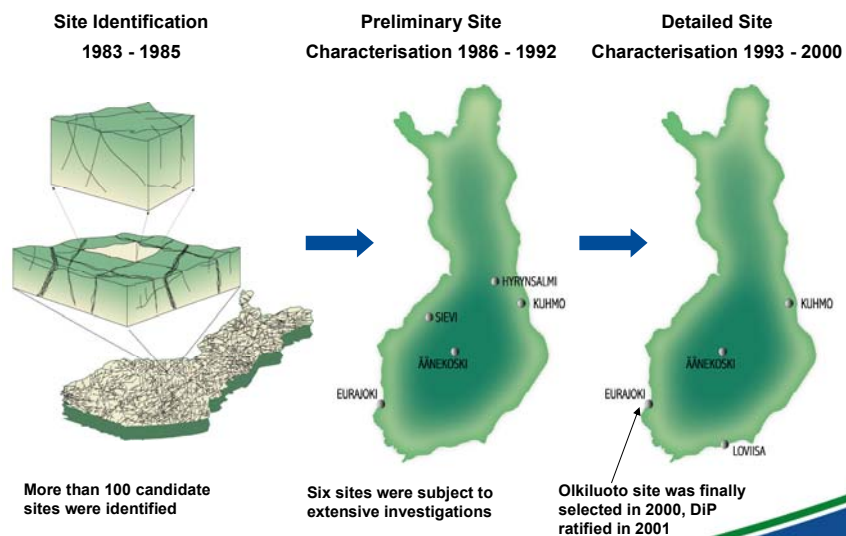
Principles

- From the reactive principle “providing correct information to the public” to the pro-active principle “providing promptly best information available to the public”
- Discuss only safety technical issues, no views on energy policy
- Take clear distance from nuclear industry, no joint events unless professionals
- Nuclear waste is already here -need to be taken care of
- At the beginning main focus and resources to municipality level (less on national/international level)
- All activities based on needs of municipalities
- Time for national activities later when the DiP in the Finnish Parliament
- Explain that STUK acts on municipalities’ side and promotes confidence in the process

Channels

- STUK management tour to the four characterisation sites: *local media*, civic organisations, local decision makers
- Participation in events organized by and with municipalities
 - seminars: single lectures and series in local high school
 - panels, discussions
 - local media: interviews, radio programs
 - newsletters
- ALARA-journal, relevant information on www-page
- all STUK experts have right and responsibility to help journalists in their work, we organize press conferences and meetings with journalists to give background and information about issues
- on request, we meet the members of Parliament in form of seminars or just briefing them

Site selection for spent fuel disposal



STUK actions at local level

- STUK created active contacts with municipal decision makers, local press and interest groups
- Help and value the press and other media in their work
- STUK emphasised the importance domestic competence in final disposal process
- STUK emphasised that safety can be best assured if the disposal R&D process continues without interruptions and with transparency towards public as well as scientific community in all issues and details of the final disposal project

Results of STUK's Public Communication in NW management

- Site for a disposal facility of SF selected, URCF (Onkalo) currently under construction, and the CL application for SF disposal facility expected in 2012
- According to Eurobarometer study http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_324_en.pdf
 - FI 59% think that nuclear safety authorities are the most reliable source of information about nuclear energy and safety
 - FI 67% think that nuclear power plants in Finland do not represent much risk/no risk at all to them
 - But only FI 48% think that disposal of radioactive waste can be done in a safe manner (*according to a national study only 41% of the citizens in the Eurajoki municipality agree*)

Lessons learned

- It was worth of making a plan how to communicate with the public but remember to update your plan
- Commit your staff to the communication principles
- Be open
- Do a good job and tell it also to the others
- Base the regulatory activities on the needs of decision makers and the public

Current and future challenges

- In general: The needs from STUK's communication are still the same as ten years ago and also our goals are the same, also the basic outline of STUK's communication strategy and principles are the same but they need to be updated.
- Changes in the world, both nuclear and ordinary world (like meaning of social media), add pressure to communications, and even keeping public's current trust to disposal process will need efforts
 - more and new audience from abroad
 - better organized critical NGO's
 - new NPP licenses mean new waste



Thank You!