

PATRAM 2001

TRANSPARENCY AND DIALOGUE:

KEYWORDS FOR GLOBAL  
ACCEPTANCE OF NUCLEAR  
TRANSPORTS

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Nuclear issues very scarcely leave the public unmoved. The current economic and environmental context and the media will certainly bring back the subject on nuclear in the near future and this is not a bad thing. Indeed, the current problem of energy supply - in California for example - and the world climate change are two major questions likely to revive the debate on the future role of nuclear energy.

However, the fact that radioactivity is invisible, untouchable, abstract... keeps alive the fear generated by the nuclear technology, a technology that is not familiar to the public and was not revealed to him through Marie Curie's work but by Hiroshima and Chernobyl.

In the nuclear transport area, like in others, from the standpoint of communication, we have to work in this context.

### **Nuclear industry, an industry like any other....**

As any industry, the nuclear one has its distinctive features. However, these specificities should not be considered as fundamentally different compared to others. In the information area, every day, current events show us that there is a worldwide demand for transparency (both from public Authorities and companies).

Risk is at the centre of contemporary public concerns. In a world perceived as more and more menacing and stressful, public opinion sensitiveness to environmental and health dangers is sharpened. People are willing to understand better the society they live in, to be deeper involved in the decision making process... They want to take their risks themselves. Thanks to new technologies, every day, a greater number has access to live information and is able to spread and share it very quickly.

We, at COGEMA, have decided to be part of this new process. Nuclear should not be a taboo subject. In order to reach this target, transparency is the only way enabling us to answer the questions raised by the people and therefore little by little, step by step to regain their trust.

We have to face this challenge and thus meet the legitimate need for information expressed by the public. Mrs Lauvergeon, our chairman, considers it as a key objective.

### **Global Acceptance: eight years of international experience**

Since the 1960s, nuclear products have been safely and routinely shipped internationally and in particular by sea between Japan and Europe. However, since 1993, at the moment of a plutonium shipment to Japan, growing concerns of the "Coastal States" have been expressed and a permanent, increasing pressure on transport issues from opponents to the nuclear energy has become challenging.

To cope with this situation, a strategy of "Global Acceptance" has been defined in cooperation between the industries: COGEMA, BNFL and ORC and their respective governments to gain a better understanding of both Authorities, opinion leaders and the medias of the "Coastal States", based on a comprehensive knowledge of our transport characteristics and safety.

Through information missions, seminars, conferences, visits and communication tools, it has become possible to initiate a dialogue both at political and media levels and to build confidence in the transportation operations. Transparency and Dialogue are "global

acceptance" key words. The major elements of this information program have been the safety of the casks and the ships.

Today, the assessment of "Global Acceptance" missions is positive. It has enabled a better understanding of the reality of our transport activities by public Authorities supported by a cooperative work with international organisations (International Maritime Organisation and International Atomic Energy Agency). Regarding the media, the perception on nuclear transport has also improved.

However, in the meantime, the preoccupations of our interlocutors have changed. New overall issues have emerged such as globalisation, growing concerns for environmental aspects, as well as new means of communication (extended use of internet...). Because of these reasons, we are now facing new challenges and need to extend our dialogue as well as capitalise on our bases.

In particular we have to provide clear and concrete answers to the questions raised by the specificities of the nuclear energy and therefore contribute to the debates and strategic decisions that are taken in the energy field.

### **The French context: a nuclear industry business opening itself to public debate:**

In France, in the past, some decisions regarding nuclear energy have been taken without providing sufficient explanation to the public. Therefore, progressively some doubts have interfered. Communications focusing only on the French energy independence and the potential of this new technology (electricity generated by nuclear power) have given people the feeling that there was no room left for dialogue. This feeling was dramatically reinforced by the Chernobyl catastrophe.

We have to keep in mind that nuclear energy is among the most if not the most controlled industry and a pioneer in the fields of quality and safety having very strict procedures to fulfil. The enforcement of numerous authorisation procedures is there to testify on this aspect.

The French Nuclear Safety Authority informs on a regular basis the people on the condition of nuclear installations using tools such as annual reports, magazines, websites...Therefore, this institution is able to fulfil its functions and its independence. It plays a key role in the implementation of transparency in our field of activity.

People directly involved in the nuclear industry have to go further in this process/demarche by encouraging this open mindedness in conformity with/to the regulations.

Therefore, we have to anticipate social changes and people expectations and favour a new "governance" based on transparency and to assume responsively this new role.

Today, the trend is reasonably favourable to nuclear energy because of the out of control energy prices variation of fossil energy and the debate currently taking place at the European level on the energy supply...It provides a better and larger audience of which we, industries, have to take advantage. The debate on nuclear issues has to be open to all citizens, politics, industries, associations... to make sure everybody is involved and can dialogue freely and openly.

## **Being Open and Transparent: a stake for the nuclear transport industry and a priority for COGEMA**

COGEMA has chosen to assume its role and duties to be a citizen-oriented company and to provide explanation to people willing to get some.

Our company, having been often at the centre of interrogations, decided a year ago to open up widely its doors to demonstrate that there is nothing to hide.

This new priority has been materialised by a proactive policy of communication and the introduction of new methods:

Dialoguing rather than ignoring : an independent committee gathering international experts, public Authorities, associations (including anti-nuclear ones) and COGEMA has been created in order to rule on the sanitary impact of the COGEMA-la- Hague plant. Beside the fact, that the conclusions were positive, we insist that this committee was really a model of coordination and openness.

Listening rather than professing: a special care has to be granted to local information commissions as it is the place where local inhabitants can express best their real concerns on nuclear matters.

We also need to learn to answer not only to technological and scientific aspects but also to take into account people specific worries, opinions and expectations.

The implementation of this policy is based on new means that can be used easily and by everybody aiming at:

- Spreading information to everybody. Thanks to Internet COGEMA has become a pioneer by installing about ten webcams on its La Hague site. More than 100,000 connexions to this web site were registered in 2000. This year, 2001, real time data on production and transport programs were put on line. Today, we are still going further with the opening of a new and more user friendly website equipped with webcams installed in the MELOX plant.
- Favouring partnerships with non governmental organisations especially on sustainable development and social policy
- Creating a debate through public organisms platforms
- Encouraging the public to come and visit us by developing further visits on our production sites. We have counted more than 25,000 visits / year. The "Week of the Energy" has given us another opportunity to be present in this process of information and openness.

But this openness to the transparency is not only dedicated to the French context. It aims at supporting the Coastal States expectations related to the transport information.

## **International developments**

The international context requires on this issue to be present everywhere, ready to react to unexpected actions, from the media ones to more institutional ones.

In the field of the nuclear material transportation, this paper will illustrate the enforcement of this transparency policy through maritime transports between Europe and Japan.

This transparency set up by ORC, BNFL and COGEMA has been evolving during these last two years. Industries have adapted their initial strategy. In the first years of this program we have answered positively to the Coastal States requirements on the safety of these transports. Other concerns are now developing: liability, economic consequences of an hypothetical accident or even a non-nuclear incident, compensation, insurance as well as non proliferation and security...

A proactive way forward has been developed. From a temporary and reactive support to the transport operations in progress, we are aiming, as often as possible, to the establishment of permanent contacts within the sensitive areas. Making information accessible, trying to develop dialogue and confidence, exchanging on concerns, answering through independent experts is now the basis of our actions.

It works, with more or less success; because the political context often remains the key issue. In the countries where an anti-nuclear minority has a very influential political position, it becomes a politicised issue.

**To be present doesn't necessarily open widely the door. But to be absent keeps it closed.**

## **The South-American context**

Last December, the Cape Horn route has been used for transporting a sixth shipment of vitrified residues to Japan. This route had not been used since 1995, when there was a misunderstanding between the Chilean Navy and the PNTL vessel concerning the application of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) inside the Chilean EEZ.

We came back five years later in South America, with a will to re-establish contacts with governmental Authorities, administrations, media. We have listened to their concerns, we have answered to their questions. Of course, opponents have reacted to our argumentation, positioning themselves on irrational and dogmatic ground.

Operational and administrative Authorities have been opened to our information. They have confirmed their confidence in the "Safety in Depth" transport concept. Indeed governmental Authorities have kept a good control on this issue at the time of the transit around Cape Horn.

## **The New Zealand case or the political influence of a minority.**

For the three partners involved in these shipments, New Zealand is an extremely sensitive ground:

- New Zealand is a "Nuclear Free Zone"
- At the top governmental level, opposition to the nuclear field is present: the current Cabinet is known to include GreenPeace members and the Government is naturally well-disposed to the GreenPeace position.
- French nuclear tests in the Pacific have revived a few years ago the opposition to any nuclear subject

The political position at the moment of the green Party gives this Party the opportunity to play a key role. Indeed, the actual government needs the green support to keep the parliamentary majority. The Green Party may so express loudly its concerns. It creates some focus on the nuclear issue by proposing bills directly linked to the nuclear area: e.g. extension of the Nuclear Free Zone to the EEZ, which has no "international legal acceptability" and which has been rejected a few days ago.

On the public ground, the evolution becomes different:

- Media don't take systematically the sensational anti-nuclear headlines. Some of them call the public opinion to a more reasonable and a less hysteric perception.
- Academics are expressing strong and positive views on the safety of these transports. (Pr Alan Poletti / Auckland University: "The probability of an accident is as close to zero as any reasonable person could expect.")

New Zealand illustrates a ground where actions to the media are essential. The political context stimulates of course the industry for carrying out its information duties to the national Authorities and we maintain essential contacts with both media and Authorities.

## **The PIF dialogue**

The Pacific Islands Forum has expressed at the time of the first MOX fuel shipment its concerns on the liability, insurance and compensation aspects linked to these shipments (HLW and MOX). Industries (COGEMA, BNFL, ORC), supported by the British, French and Japanese governments have set up with the PIF representatives a legal experts working group. This group has met regularly and discussions are progressing positively in a very good spirit.

For their interest, PIF countries are particularly interested in the positive consequences of the future extended conventions of Paris and Vienna: jurisdictions and damage compensation.

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**In conclusion, this program of Global Acceptance in the field of nuclear material transport that COGEMA is pursuing in partnership with BNFL and ORC is perfectly in accordance with the global philosophy of the company: transparency, dialogue and public involvement.**

