



## **Transparency & Dialogue: The Keys of Radioactive Material Transportation**

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Today, public opinion, local actors, organizations and associations are expecting a transparent information on nuclear activities.

The fact is, a great number already has daily instant access to information and is able to share it very quickly, thanks to new technologies.

Public opinion's sensitiveness is a key element, as risk remains at the center of public concerns. The discrepancy between objectively assessed risks and perceived risks is a permanent challenge for acceptance of nuclear energy. The opponents are also using it, to build their misleading strategy.

When anti-nuclear groups claim for an increasing involvement in the decision-making processes, they also get there the most efficient means to hamper our activities, namely operational information on the nuclear transport activities.

In order to tackle this challenging issue, COGEMA and its parent company AREVA are engaged in improving their information policy. It has been extended to international and national transports commissioned by COGEMA LOGISTICS. Regarding the most recent transport operations, specific information policy has been implemented at the national and local level through media, information committees, trade unions,...

But, on the one hand, this policy is facing limits: transparency and openness stop where sensitivity and confidentiality start. On the other hand, opponents are building a challenging process, which is "more and more". Whatever the industry efforts are, opponents will remain unsatisfied as they cannot afford otherwise.

Consequently, we need to assume a proactive policy in the field of the information on safety of radioactive material transportation. But above all, this policy must be dedicated to the public opinion. It must not be a way to answer to opponent's attacks. The industry's transparency and information must support public opinion's understanding of the important issues which are on progress: global access to the energy, preservation of the environment, providing the cleanest industrial energy to the world, acting against the CO<sub>2</sub> effects and the essential role of safe transport operations in this context.

Our challenge: enforcing an efficient operational transparency and information policy, supported by an optimized communication policy.

### **Introduction**

Risk is at the center of public concerns. Contemporary society is perceived as more and more "threatening" and general public's sensitiveness to environmental hazards is sharpened. People wish they understood each aspect of the society they live in and they were involved in each decision making process. Consequently, several industrial or economic branches have set up information commissions, public forums, oversight boards whose members are picked up in consumer associations, etc. Public opinion's demands are significant: they reveal that a large number request a society where risk is totally controlled, if not a society devoid of risk.

Thus, each entity with a social responsibility has a duty to control the risks induced by its activities. But the fact is, part of the risk to deal with is a product of collective imagination, fed by media and various opinion makers. Among these are opposition groups.

Nuclear activities are perceived as risky, and opponents have singled out transport as an attack angle: it is a vital link for industry, and it comes very close to large numbers of citizens.

COGEMA LOGISTICS has been transporting nuclear materials for over 40 years, at national and international levels, and our transports involve particularly large quantities of activity per shipment (spent fuel, vitrified waste...) and emotion-laden material names (plutonium...). National transports are implemented daily in France and there is no strong opposition to them, but things are different for some international transports.

## **French context, opponents' strategy**

### **1 - The acceptance of nuclear activities**

After several years of transparency policy, it now seems that public opinion regards nuclear industry as a common one. An opinion poll prepared by the French IRSN<sup>1</sup> in 2002 confirms this encouraging trend. Concerns about climate change is likely to further help. Transport activities do not appear as a special issue.

### **2 - Ideological and rational views on nuclear issues**

There are two distinct fields: an ideological one occupied by opponents, and a rational one occupied by pro-nuclear side.

Confronted with a relatively confident public opinion, opponents make every effort to direct public scrutiny on nuclear industry, addressing media through resounding coups aimed mostly at transport (e.g. Greenpeace's action against a classified road transport, a train stopped by a single man near Blayais NPP). This whole strategy is aimed at widening the gap between assessed and imaginary, perceived risks. As long as the opposition remains in this emotional field and that industry merely considers facts and assessed risk, there is no possibility for mutual understanding. In this context, both sides never establish any direct relationship with each other, and some rare contacts are noticed in forums organized by third parties (e.g. administrations and local authorities).

As a result, media interest mainly focus on the spectacular confrontations between the two parties and the main issues (sustainable development, real benefits and shortcomings of nuclear energy, etc) are concealed. We regret that such a *status quo* prevails, and we are definitely in favor of a constructive debate, based on rationality and good sense. Come to that, we are pleased to note that Mrs Rivasi, who recently resigned from the chairmanship of Greenpeace France, now points out the limits of her former group's systematic opposition strategy<sup>2</sup>.

### **3 - No grounds for opposing**

Nuclear industry collects safety records on roads, railways and seas, and there is no denying that nuclear materials transports are probably the safest in the world. So the opponents have no other choice than to attract general public's interest by using unfounded assumptions and scenarii.

### **4 – An industry facing its duties**

In the field of information and communication on nuclear activities, opponents do not have to report to any supervision authority: no shareholder, no international agency, no administration have influence on their action as long as they more or less abide by the law. In such conditions, opposition misinforms general public with no fear of being censored or punished.

On the contrary, industry is strictly controlled. It reports in many ways to various authorities<sup>3</sup> and it must abide by national and international regulations. Such requirements have an impact on our communication policy.

### **5 - Emotion: the mainstay of the opposition's communication policy**

In the past, French strategic decisions on nuclear energy were made without being explained to the public. Therefore, doubts have progressively arisen about the possibility of a collective debate on matters linked with nuclear energy. This concern was reinforced by the Chernobyl catastrophe, whose aftermath was perhaps insufficiently managed by French authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> "Perception des risques et de la sécurité - résultats du sondage de novembre 2002" (IRSN - novembre 2002)

<sup>2</sup> 08/06/2003, Mrs Rivasi admitted in an interview for French website novethic.fr that Greenpeace "should move to something else than its always-against strategy."

<sup>3</sup> French Safety Authority under control of Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Industry

From that time, most of the opponents have been focusing on Chernobyl. They now take the opportunity of terrorism resurgence to compare our transported materials with nuclear bombs. Needless to say, these materials are just contributing to provide energy or medical benefits, with no other envisioned use. But stereotyping makes it easier to unsettle the man in the street...

## **6 – The opposition's *modus operandi*: two case studies**

Misinformation from the opposition groups often revolves around the same subject: risks linked with nuclear materials transport, which is identified as the Achilles' heel of the nuclear cycle. Two recent events are indicative of this transport-focused harassment strategy.

One is the resumption of nuclear transport between Germany and France. In May 2001 it raised concerns, particularly in Alsace (France), a region regarded as the gateway to/from Germany for nuclear materials transportation (Spent Fuel and High Active waste from/to France and United Kingdom).

Firstly, mayors of local towns expressed their need for more information on our activities. To answer this request, we participated in an information Committee which was held in Strasbourg and involved Authorities, Mayors, media and industries. Secondly, French Authorities as well as industry representatives had the opportunity to give much detail on nuclear transport activities at the Annual French Mayors Congress, in November 2001.

Another key-event occurred in 2003, as some anti-nuclear organizations were focusing their action on the risks allegedly linked to the transport of plutonium, and launching a plutonium threat-dedicated website (this website included a section unveiling the trucks' registration numbers as well as the nature and details of their content and routes, which is illegal). In February of that year, a group of Greenpeace activists carried out an action against a classified road transport – they indeed used force to stop the truck, and had the luck of being identified by its escort which chose not to respond. Additional actions from self-proclaimed ecologists were noticed in front of the COGEMA-La Hague plant and the COGEMA LOGISTICS railroad terminal located at Valognes (France), just before the French national debate on nuclear energy.

## **7 - The potential cost of head-on opposition**

Due to opposition, the organization of transport operations may become more and more complex:

- mobilization of numerous police forces;
- a regulatory pressure, though our transports are already among the safest in the world;
- occasional media pressure.

Resources dedicated to the limitation of opponents' interference do not bring any added value or safety to the transport activity itself.

## **Industry's information and communication strategy**

### **1 - The slight difference between information and communication**

COGEMA LOGISTICS goes by the principles and rules of the AREVA Group and works in close cooperation with its network.

### ***Information policy: A task force provides the right information at the right time and at the right place***

- COGEMA LOGISTICS' availability to media;
- COGEMA LOGISTICS' presence on the media scene and in local information committees, trade unions committees, whenever necessary;
- COGEMA LOGISTICS' ability to deliver information quickly.

### **A wide range of communication tools**

- Our website enable general public to develop a better knowledge of our transport activities, and is linked to the Group's websites.
- Although visits to our facilities are severely restricted because of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we strive to keep the doors open to specific publics such as officials, media, transport partners and opponents of many countries.

- A choice of information tools, from leaflets to CD-roms and videos, is available to the public.

## **2 - Our policy is facing limits...**

In the last two years, opposing organizations have become more vocal on our transport activities :

- Early last year, opponents have carried out an action against a sensitive material road transport to try to attract media attention once again (see *supra*).
- Other additional actions from opponents took place in front of COGEMA-La Hague plant and COGEMA LOGISTICS' railroad terminal located at Valognes (France), just before the French national Debate on nuclear energy.
- In March 2004, they managed to have several minutes against plutonium transport in the 8 o'clock news of a major TV channel.

In order to tackle these challenges, COGEMA LOGISTICS and its parent companies engaged in improving their information policy. It has been extended to international and national transports commissioned by COGEMA LOGISTICS. Regarding our most recent transport operations, specific information policy has been implemented at the national and local scale.

But, on the one hand, this policy is facing limits:

- classical communication schemes are based on short and synthetic messages; it is a challenge to apply them to a complex, technical area;
- nuclear is a hot topic in local, political games around the world;
- Transparency and openness stop where sensitivity and confidentiality start;
- whatever the industry efforts are, opponents cannot ever be satisfied, as they would lose their cause and jobs.

## **3 - Why confidentiality?**

- To protect transported materials from potential hostile actions;
- To protect sensitive, commercial information (just like any other industry does).

Transparency and openness stop where confidentiality start. And the fact is, some aspects of our sensitive transports are kept confidential on the request of our Authorities. Besides, some opponents have adopted a dogmatic stance that even an exhaustive information supply cannot modify. They keep requesting information on nuclear activities but pretend to be unsatisfied whatever the industry efforts are. We have repeatedly invited some opponent group representatives to visit our sites, with little success.

## **4 - Information and communication operations**

Global communication on our transport activity is unavoidable, but a specific release for each transport does not have much interest:

- Our transports' principles have been explained again and again;
- Most of these transports are implemented on a routine basis;
- Security constraints prevent us from communicating on every operation;
- Too many information releases create no added value.

All information and communication operations are dedicated to the general public, even those targeting opinion makers (journalists, scientists, high-ranking civil servants, etc). On a global scale, industry's transparency policy just support public opinion's understanding of the issues which are on progress: global access to energy, preservation of the environment, greenhouse effect. Attacks from the opponents are rarely at the origin of our communications, and we do not adapt our messages to them.

## **Conclusion**

As transport is marginally less complex than nuclear facilities, it remains possible to inform moderately scientific publics on the high degree of safety of our transport activities. We make every

effort to break the last *clichés* about the alleged opacity of nuclear in our field, and to get closer to the average citizen.

This neighbourhood attitude moves us towards local actors (local authorities, local groups of interest, etc), and we participate in more and more French local information commissions (CLI).

Eventually, proximity communication on transports may pay at a larger scale, as the majority of French people now trust nuclear. However, we remain convinced that we must go further and reach every public we have not met so far. The task is huge but we like transport challenges.