

THE URANIUM INSTITUTE TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP: A COMMON APPROACH TO GLOBAL ISSUES

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SUMMARY

With more than 442 nuclear power plants in operation all over the world delivering clean and safe electricity on a daily basis, nuclear energy is and will undoubtedly be one of the most promising way to cope with present and future economic, demographic, and environmental challenges.

Nuclear materials transportation business links the various nuclear actors: research institutes, utilities, fuel cycle industries, and waste management agencies. As pipelines or tankers for the petroleum industry, transportation gives nuclear energy its consistency. Still, conversely to other industrial areas, transportation volumes and figures are rather low in the nuclear business. For instance, transport of dangerous goods in France represents around 15 million packages per year. Out of this, only 15, 000 or 0,1 % are nuclear fuel cycle materials. When applied to the USA, this figure is even more striking: 100 million of dangerous goods containers are shipped each year. Only 10, 000 pertains to nuclear fuel cycle materials.

Even so, in our world of economic and cultural globalization, transport of nuclear materials is no longer a domestic issue. It crosses boundaries and appeals to various areas ranging from safety to communication. That is why the Uranium Institute decided, in 1995, to set up a working group dedicated to transport issues.

This paper covers the Uranium Institute Transport Working Group, from its creation to its most recent achievements.

THE GENESIS OF THE URANIUM INSTITUTE TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP

Transport of nuclear materials is not new. Such transports have been carried out since the very beginning of the nuclear era. But since the 50s, the increasing reliance on nuclear energy has boosted this transport activity especially in leading nuclear countries such as France, Japan, or the USA. The community of nuclear carriers has grew accordingly. Still, the overall figure of nuclear transports and carriers remains very low when compared with other industrial transport domains.

Today, nuclear transport is performed by companies in various countries, ranging from small companies fulfilling local and regional duties to big players offering a world-class service. These companies have a well-established record of safety and mastery as shown by decades of regular but rather unnoticed operations.

Nevertheless, after years of near-silence, nuclear opponents have begun to question the way some of these transports were performed. By fueling media attention, they have succeeded in raising some eyebrows in the general public.

Coping with this situation was not an easy task with people doing the same business in place different as can be the United States, Europe or Japan. Working hand-in-hand became a necessity. Besides, the Uranium Institute's Committee on Nuclear Energy and the Public decided in September 1995 to set up a working group devoted to transport issues.

As the primary nuclear industry forum, which gathers nuclear executives and operatives from all over the world, the Uranium Institute seemed the perfect place to host such a group. The primary focus of the Group was defined as follows: delivering a clear picture of the very reality of today's nuclear transportation business and proposing common answers to common questions.

SETTING UP OF URANIUM INSTITUTE TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP

Since its creation, the UI's Transport Working Group gathers people from different nuclear transport companies, nuclear fuel cycle companies and utilities such as BNFL, ConverDyn, EDF, NY Nuclear, COGEMA/Transnucléaire, or TEPCO. Members of the Working Group are whether in charge of daily transport operations or involved in strategic planning, communication or regulatory issues.

This diversity of industrial profiles gives the Working Group a specific touch as its members can make a personal contribution while improving the common culture and knowledge of the Group. In addition, the Working Group's variety of companies makes clear that transportation of nuclear materials is a significant topic whose smooth implementation is of utmost importance for the whole nuclear industry.

Aware of the changes previously depicted, the members of the Group decided to draft an industry brief that would reflect the nuclear transportation community daily cares and give common, applicable and useful blueprints to people who share the same constraints. This decision is in accordance with the Uranium Institute's policy of covering the entire nuclear fuel cycle, to address all the issues tied to the nuclear activity, while improving the global nuclear knowledge for nuclear operatives and representatives.

THE URANIUM INSTITUTE TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP: THE INDUSTRY BRIEF

The Uranium Institute Transport Working Group Industry Brief was adopted by the London-based body in June 1997. Tim Meadley, Head of UI's External Communications rightly puts it: « *It [the Industry Brief] draws the attention of members to the importance of everyone making efforts to prevent the industry's ability to transport materials from being compromised* ».

In other words, the transportation sector has been targeted by antinuclear opponents in their global fight against nuclear industry. It is up to the nuclear community's members to be aware of this situation and to take the appropriate steps to make the necessary concerted efforts. This is precisely the aim of the Industry Brief.

TRANSPORT OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS: THE STAKES

First, after a short reminder of the importance of this specific aspect of the nuclear industry, the brief highlights the strategy adopted by antinuclear opponents which can be summarized as follows: take advantage of the public's lack of knowledge regarding nuclear transport and disseminate false and so-called « scientific » information aimed at scaring the public who often ignores the state of worldwide use of nuclear energy and its rigorous regulatory and safety principles.

The Working Group makes clear that nuclear industry's first and foremost task is to demonstrate that nuclear energy brings a notably positive contribution to the world energy mix while reducing harmful effects such as emission of greenhouse gases.

Second, one must bear in mind that media campaigns against nuclear transports are conceived by people who simply promote their own agenda careless of the adverse consequences their actions could have on our daily lives (lessening the share of nuclear power in the world energy mix will result in an increased reliance on fossil fuels, the main contributors to the greenhouse gases effect). Opponents to nuclear transports push for stricter regulations, not for any safety or ethical aims, but simply in order to make transports more difficult and finally to paralyze the nuclear transport business and halt nuclear energy.

This large scale agenda implies that nuclear transportation community must not feel isolated from the rest of the world nuclear members. For instance, the entire nuclear industry must be aware that it is essential to keep an eye on the evolution of transport regulatory aspects. Nuclear industry must welcome any regulatory initiatives that will lead to actual improvements in safety, but must vehemently refuse regulations that will have a negative and fruitless impact. For instance, antinuclear groups ask for greater safety standards which, in turn, appear to be useless and participate in the reduction of the nuclear option's competitiveness. In any case, past and successful experience must prevail when one considers introducing new regulatory features. Nuclear industry members must therefore be extremely watchful when dealing with such issues.

Third, nuclear industry members must be sensible to the fact that antinuclear opponents have several favored targets including public opinion, politicians, and international agencies in charge of regulating and monitoring the nuclear sector. They use the same strategy in all cases by providing inaccurate affirmations to people who, for evident reasons such as being nationals of non-nuclear countries, don't perceive the ins and outs of nuclear transportation issues.

PUBLIC OPINION & POLITICIANS

Public opinion and politicians are two primary targets for nuclear opponents when it comes to nuclear transport issues. Their tactics is quite simple. By portraying nuclear transport as a dangerous activity, they try to interact between public opinion and the politicians. To put it bluntly, they hope that nurturing the public's natural fear of radiation will pressure policymakers in a more restrictive way when the time has come to consider such matters during parliamentary debates.

In that field, communication is an uncircumventable parameter. The Industry Brief clearly underlines that point: « *All segments of the nuclear industry must include information on transport in their communication programs targeted at the public, politicians, bureaucrats and others with influence* ». Education of public opinion - through TV, radio or newspapers - is therefore a must-do objective for the nuclear community. One can find a good example of what a balanced TV show can generate with the « Frontline » program aired on the US PBS channel, April 22nd, 1997. This broadcast analyzed the successful implementation of the French nuclear program with regard to the current American situation. The producers of « Frontline » deliberately chosen to have a look at the striking differences between the French and the US public attitudes toward nuclear power. Covering the nuclear issue from that angle led antinuclear critics to try to stop the show because, according to them, it was a twisted approach which did not reflect enough the « public's aversion » to nuclear power.

This example shows that honesty is an asset, not a strain, in the debate about nuclear energy. Let us illustrate this with another example. Recent public relation operations carried out by fuel cycle companies regarding transport aspects have shown that relationships between nuclear actors and international representatives from various fields (journalists, experts...) bring positive results when based on openness, fairness and mutual trust. The combination of safety high professionalism and industrial skills shown by the nuclear transportation community over the last 40 years paves the way for such communication policy.

INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES

Among the tactics used by antinuclear opponents, it is worth underlining that several anti-nuclear organizations have acquired a specific status within international agencies (such as the International Maritime Organization or the Oslo and Paris Commission). This position enable them to pursue their strategy of misinformation. For instance, they raise issues outside the agency's jurisdiction which leads to greater confusion and embarrassment.

The answer of the nuclear industry must be unequivocal. We must ensure that delegates to

international agencies are familiar with the industrial approach taken towards transport in terms of technical or safety issues. But, the industry past record must also be praised without fear. Delegates must also be made aware of the industry's legitimate concerns regarding the impact that standards which include unjustified requirements could have.

For instance, one of the current debate at the IMO pertains to the United Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the requirement to implement a prior notification of passage to coastal States by vessels carrying nuclear materials. Such a proposal has to be consistent with the main principles of the UNCLOS, the international public reference in terms of rights and practices. The UNCLOS stresses that, as far as the sea is concerned, all ships have the right of innocent passage in the territorial sea (12 miles) and the freedom of navigation in the EEZ (200 miles) without any prior notification. In this frame, the nuclear industry has to remain aware of this debate and to work closely with delegates to international agencies dealing with this issue.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Undoubtedly, the Uranium Institute Transport Working Group through its Industry Brief has reached its first goal which was the elaboration of a comprehensive and educational document able to give the nuclear community a clear perception of the nuclear transportation activity, its stakes, and its reality.

By giving nuclear transportation operatives simple but useful advice when dealing with delegates to international agencies or responding to antinuclear representatives, the Uranium Institute Transport Working Group plays its role as a link between various companies operating in various conditions.

The external diffusion of this document answers to the Transport Group's main objective: make the whole nuclear community aware of the transport issues. International nuclear conferences like PATRAM are then the ideal places to convey the Uranium Institute transportation message.

The next steps include the diffusion of more information about nuclear transports materials including ready-to-use fact sheets (types, quantities and modes of transports of nuclear materials) or participation to international conferences. This communication strategy, aimed at both nuclear professionals and, by extension, to the general public, will be an improved way to make people realize that transportation of nuclear materials is « *essential to the functioning of the nuclear fuel cycle* ».