

## PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF TRANSPORT: INTERNATIONAL STATUS

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### SUMMARY

In the framework of reprocessing-recycling policy chosen by the Japanese utilities in order to satisfy Japan's energy need, sea transports of spent fuel have been carried out for twenty years between Japan and Europe. All these sea shipments have been realized without any specific public interest.

In 1992, the voyage of the *Akatsuki Maru*, carrying Japanese plutonium from COGEMA-La Hague reprocessing plant to Japan marked the beginning of interest to this kind of transports. Some concerns have been voiced by en-route States having the feeling that nuclear material is shipped « through their backyard », and in the same time anti-nuclear organizations generated some issues on this activity. Suddenly, transportation issues which had for many years taken a back seat to other nuclear topics, have met an increasing global questioning. These circumstances went on during the first return of vitrified residues in 1995.

Facing this situation, the industrial community - COGEMA, in close cooperation with its Japanese and British partners- has decided to implement a dedicated communication. It works to facilitate each on-going shipment, but also to help acceptance of coming transport campaign: for instance, one has indeed to keep in mind that one or two shipments by year of vitrified residues will take place in the next ten years.

### AN INTERNATIONAL STATUS BY NATURE

First of all, this activity of public acceptance is international, because the three partners involved are from different States and continents. On one side, the representatives of all the Japanese utilities, which are gathered into the Overseas Reprocessing Committee (ORC). On the other side, COGEMA in charge of reprocessing activities and BNFL, today the main shareholder -with COGEMA and Japanese electric power companies- of Pacific Nuclear

Transport Limited (PNTL), solely formed for the transport of nuclear materials between Japan and Europe. No need is to describe the time spent to share commercial and operational experience and to exchange points of view with a common target, that is to say the successful carrying out of each shipment for each customer in any country. Used to deal more often than not with domestic considerations, we try all together to deal with international issues.

But mainly, this activity is international, because it takes place in a global framework with all its features and constraints. A few example can illustrate how carefully we have to deal with this international environment. At the time of information highway, each event or non-event could be communicated all around the world in minutes: the challenge for us is therefore to address misconceptions and to correct misinformation as soon as they happen. Slow communication is often bad communication, because the information has to be delivered at the right moment.

Added to that, the international landscape of media has its own rules, which require us to adapt our way of communicating: texts and words alone are not enough to replace the negative pictures that could be raised. That's why it's necessary to show, during direct contacts, how the ship and the packaging look. That's also why a video « Safe passage » has been produced: it helps the audience visually appreciate the safety measures governing our activity. This user-friendly communication is essential, in so far as safety is often received as a boring matter.

At last, we have to be aware that all the industrial issues -not only the nuclear field- have to deal with new stakes. From global warming to acid rain, one can easily note that the concern of our end of century is the fear of a potential irreversible environment damage. The greening process of industrial debates is an uncircumventable parameter of our activity surrounding.

## MAIN LINES OF OUR PA STRATEGY

The second return of vitrified residues from France to Japan (two TN 28 casks, each loaded with 20 canisters) has been carried out between January and mid-March 1997. The PNTL ship (*Pacific Teal*) set off from Cherbourg to sail to the Japanese port of Mutsu-Ogawara via the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean and the south west Pacific.

The third shipment took place at the beginning of the year 1998. The *Pacific Swan*, with 60 canisters on board (three casks), left Cherbourg the 21st January 1998 and arrived at Mutsu-Ogawara the 13th March of 1998. The ship moved through the Panama Canal.

In view of previous shipments, these voyage have been accompanied by a comprehensive PA strategy, with the full cooperation of our own Authorities. We learned a lot about the benefits it created, but also about the way to improve it.

The overall strategy was to develop messages emphasizing concrete explanations. The most important messages could be clustered into a communication triad:

- the transportation of nuclear materials is strictly governed by rigorous international regulations (IAEA recommendations, and IMO regulations for sea transportation),

- both packaging and ship are designed to ensure the maximum level of safety that one can require,
- our experience: routine shipments have been performed for more than 30 years without a single accident involving the release of radioactivity. It's a second to none record.

Two main targets have been chosen for this policy, implemented just before and at the time of the shipment. First, delegates of the three States involved and representatives of the industry have met with the governments of some en-route States. Second, media briefings have been organized by COGEMA, BNFL and ORC in order to answer instantaneously to journalists' questions. This last point is very important, because anti-nuclear organizations are very proactive as ship is passing coasts of key countries. All these missions were on-the-ground, because nothing can replace face-to-face briefings.

The presence in countries such as South Africa, New-Zealand, or the Caribbean zone and the Panama Canal has also created the chance to meet some opinion former such as academics or experts. Being independent from the nuclear industry, they are able to insert a great degree of rationality and credibility into what stays too often a very emotional issue.

To assess briefly the results of this communication, one can say that we succeeded to better understand the perceptions surrounding shipments and to generate more balanced coverage.

### **THE BOTTOM LINE: THE NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ANSWERS**

The second return was a learning experience and the principles selected at this occasion have been implemented for the third return. These shipments have helped us to better consider the future strategies. In this specific framework, the international implementation of COGEMA Group, and especially the two entities in Washington and Tokyo acting as a network with the Paris' offices, is particularly valuable.

The next objectives we have to reach could be summed up as follows:

- We have to adapt ourselves to the States' and public expectations which differ from one country to another. It is indeed clear that perceptions of nuclear shipment are shaped by many factors such as political history, diplomatic relations, energy situation, importance of tourism or fishing resources... That means that beyond our key safety messages, we need to be able to define and address the different issues before concerns come up.

The fact of having offices in Washington or Tokyo allow the COGEMA Group to be much closer to other continents or regions, like the Caribbean, the South-American or the Pacific area. This geographic distribution is very useful, because it helps us to make a daily evaluation and to be on guard against any possible « stunts ». It allows us also to be more aware of the importance of regional organization such as the CARICOM (Caribbean Community Market) or the South Pacific Forum. Without any doubt, having international representations makes easier a monitoring approach and grasping situations or concerns different from ours.

- More deeply, we have become aware that our commitment has to be a long one: we can't turn on and off our PA activities and we have to look beyond shipment-to-shipment.

The best result we could hope for incoming shipments is the decrease of our communication activity until a possible no-need of PA actions, because our daily PA work would have been enough to build public confidence in nuclear transportation.

To reach this target, we try to maintain regular and constructive relationships with the different key media, the government officials, our respective Embassies, and the third party we met during the missions. First of all, the presence of COGEMA-Transnucléaire in different areas helps us to answer quickly to any new concern and to manage better information service, by being in the same time-zone as our interlocutors. As previously underlined, slow response means lost ground. If it allows us to act quickly, it is also a way to be pro-active. By being closer to our audience, we have the chance to have on-hand spokesperson, able to go eventually in these different countries and to maintain closer and more personal relationship.

- We have also learned that at the time of the shipment, we need sometimes to act very quickly, taking into account changing environment. Once again, the more closer we are to these countries, the most easier it is to have on-the-ground COGEMA representatives, in order to correct misinformation and set the record straight, before the issue becomes an old story.

More generally, the COGEMA network has appeared to be a human-tank, offering both flexibility capacities and various expert abilities. First, because there are several persons working on transportation PA, we were able to get through a lot of work, but also to organize simultaneous on-the-ground missions in different regions.

Second, the difference of profiles of persons involved in these activities -we tried each time to associate an engineer with communication or law of the sea specialists- helps us to reach a global approach of this matter and to address in the best possible conditions the variety of issues connected to nuclear materials transportation.

- At last, another feedback of this strategy was that we had to continue our policy of openness, whose spirit is really appreciated by targeted audiences whatever they think. In August 1997 a tour of nuclear facilities in France and United Kingdom has been organized, in order to maintain and extend the relations network, but also to materialize it and to give its own dynamic to it.

The so-called *Project Evidence* has therefore gathered academics, experts, and journalists from Chile, Argentina, New-Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Jamaica, Panama, South Africa, United States... The main purpose of this tour was to show our main reprocessing-recycling and transport facilities or means and the « safety culture » that governed them. It has also afforded the participants to exchange informally between themselves and to meet with the managers overseeing these facilities. The tour ended with an informal debriefing session, allowing the participants to ask all the questions they wanted.

This audience has responded well to the project: seeing the operation firsthand is a demonstrative communication tool.

For our own experience, *Evidence* has confirmed that, beyond a strong sense of safety, many factors shape public perception of nuclear transportation and nuclear power in general. Moreover, if the international status of the PA consists in traveling and having face-to-face contacts with people, it is also to invite people to see our installations, in order to give them actual experiences of nuclear industry.

The members of this network have become privileged interlocutors of our communication policy: they are addressed all the documentation we diffuse as well as the press releases published.

One of the other main lesson learned at the contact of such various and faraway people is that the need for quick and truly international information diffusion tools is uncircumventable. That's why the third shipment was the occasion to rely on the Internet way of communication: basic information on the features of the shipment of vitrified residues as well as press releases have been therefore loaded on the site of the COGEMA Group.

## CONCLUSION

Fruitful PA strategy requires several key elements. They include a non-intimidating forum for exchanging information, two-way communication, advance preparation to identify what the parties want to learn, and feedback.

There is no single approach that guarantees success, because a lot of factors play a role in determining the most workable approach for any particular situation. The COGEMA Group implementation as well as its manpower -in close cooperation with our British and Japanese partners- help to manage this complex, but stimulating issue.