

A COMMUNICATION TOOL-KIT TO COMBAT PROBLEMS SHIPPING RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL

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ABSTRACT

As part of the tools to combat problems shipping radioactive materials a tool-kit for communication has been developed. This paper sets out the contents of the tool-kit and how it is applied.

INTRODUCTION

A review of the incidents of denial of shipment has identified that effective communication is a key factor in mitigating problems. There have been several concepts put forward concerning how to work in this area; however the end result has been a focus on a top down message with a bottom up delivery.

In short the idea is to collect, in a central international repository, items that can be used in communication at a local level.

A COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

A communication toolkit is in effect a collection of inputs, from a range of sources. Under development by the IAEA Transport Safety Unit is a communications toolkit intended to support National Focal Points and Regional Coordinators. The individual items do not need to be approved or sanctioned by the IAEA, but are collected by IAEA for use by those working in the field of communication related to denial of shipment.

The initial concept for the content

As an initial proposal, a communication expert was employed by IAEA to initiate this work. They delivered an outline for a toolkit:

- A dedicated thematic site on the main IAEA.org website, including
 - Facts and figures and case studies
 - Costs of denial – human, environmental and economic
 - Audio-visual material including an IAEA Transport Safety Unit video – already in production
 - Links to available multi-media material
 - Links to the IAEA Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT) website and other appropriate IAEA web pages
 - Links to the websites of business associations whose members have a stake in the movement of class 7 cargo

- A PowerPoint presentation on delay and denial with lecture notes
- Multi-media package, including
 - print article,
 - photo essay,
 - podcast, and
 - video clips about delivery of healthcare in developing countries (initially involving Cobalt-60)
- Printed material products such as:
 - Q & A
 - Reports from the field (Profiles from the front line about the men and women who deliver humanitarian assistance)
 - Comic Strips
 - Fact sheets, particularly about class 7 materials, such as tantalite, Co-60, and other radioactive materials
 - Brochures

Most of these elements are drawn from the recommendations of the International Steering Committee on Denial of Shipment Communications Working Group.

The message

We hardly need to be reminded that incidents of delay and denial are impeding the delivery of class 7 radioactive materials. But what we may lose sight of is the dimension of its human cost – the consequence when such material is held up or not delivered. In developing this toolkit the focus is on the importance of telling the human story, as well as taking other steps to address the problem of delay and denial.

The toolkit is intended to be a dynamic element in the IAEA Action Plan addressing delay and denial and a requirement of it is for strong local support. The input of additional material that can be employed will be vital to its success.

In too many instances the reason for delay and denial is the consequence of, not only a patchwork of different regulatory regimes, but an attitude -- that it's just too much trouble to handle Class 7 material. Many who have worked over the years for the IAEA have met cancer patients in countries where medical care is meagre, for whom Cobalt-60, for example, made the difference between pain, humiliation, and an uncertain fate for their children. In the light of that awareness we can't afford indifference.

Sub-Saharan Africa wishes to better employ the sterile insect technique against the scourge of pest borne disease. In the industrialised world it's used with great effectiveness; the irradiators that sterilise male insects before they are released into the wild are driven by Cobalt -60. Of course Cobalt-60 is but one of a number of materials classified Class 7, yet it is shorthand for the consequences of obstacles to the shipment of Class 7 materials.

The toolkit is also predicated on the acknowledgement that in general, there is lack of understanding about the utility of radioactive materials. Providing such information is also an important part of story we are telling. In day to day interaction this is basic knowledge that needs to be communicated as people go about their tasks. It must be part of building awareness without which the delay and denial issue will not be resolved.

The resistance of the tyres on our cars to blowouts, the safety of passenger aeroplanes, the assurance that medical equipment is germ free – these all rely on radiation technologies.

But constant vigilance and strict regulation, to ensure safety and security, are required in the management of radioactive sources. They are made use of only with very clear justification. Nevertheless recognition must be given to the fact that the current state of their safe transport and handling reflects the accumulation of nearly half a century of practise, experience and knowledge.

Yes there are risks, there are dangers, and precautions must always be ensured. We must engage stakeholders and help build their confidence. But the foundation of the process must rest on factual information. At no time should the message provide false reassurance. The process of communicating is to win trust – it's also to empower and equip stakeholders to contribute to the process of maintaining safety and security. A fearful or ill informed body of people who are involved in handling radioactive material is a formula for calamity.

Fuller public disclosure, in particular that there is a crisis in the delivery of radioactive material, used in diverse ways to save life and ensure safety, can only support efforts to break the delay and denial logjam.

Q and A

As part of the toolkit a series of questions and answers have been developed for the user.

When do we Communicate?

In nuclear communications there are two types of stakeholders we must inform: those in the internal category who are involved in the decision making process, and external stakeholders who are most often affected by issues, either directly or emotionally.

Should I differentiate between the types of stakeholders?

To achieve a successful outcome will require the involvement of both stakeholder groups and we need make no distinction between them.

When should I consider using communications as a tool to address a delay and denial problem?

Communications, if the goal is to inform and enlighten stakeholders about the importance of eliminating delays and denial of class 7 material, must be an ongoing process, whether informing the handler or the shipping line CEO. In other words communicating factual information about class 7 material and the obstacles faced in its transportation must be seamless.

Should I talk to the news media about a denial?

Communicating with the news media is best left to professional communicators, and the Regional Coordinator together with the IAEA Transport Safety Unit should be the arbiter in taking a decision to involve the news media. There may be exceptions to this

recommendation but the Action Plan is striving to have a coordinated response to the delay and denial issue.

Then, how can I use communications to assist me?

There's a proverb that a rising tide lifts all boats and a clear concern in the delay and denial issue is that there's insufficient awareness at all levels about what's involved. Therefore, factual information must be provided to all stakeholders, whether informally in conversation, or formally in targeted campaigns.

Are there examples of communications being used successfully to end delays?

In 2006 authorities in Panama requested the IAEA organize a communications training workshop that involved executives from the canal authority and communicators about the transport of radioactive material through the Panama Canal. The outcome is that the canal continues to permit the passage of class 7 material without impediment.

SIMPLE TO RETASK

The ability to retask items in the toolkit easily is essential to its success. To this end a concept of using word free or limited text communication has been examined.

Guidelines for how to use toolkit / run campaigns will be placed on the ISC-DOS members' pages. National and regional networks will be responsible for localising tool-kit materials, identifying local targets and local delivery (bottom-up approach). An international communications working group will identify target audiences (e.g. IFALPA, IATA, Ports Association) and delivery on the global level.

Key Success Factors

It has been identified that an important aspect of delivery of the communication toolkit is to ensure that appropriate experts are employed. In the same way that an expert in shielding is employed to give advice on shielding it is important, for communication, to identify and use a qualified communications expert.

The use a "story-telling" approach can often deliver a message to people that are unlikely to respond to scientific papers. It is important to ensure that the content for outreach is accessible, compelling and robust. The audience needs to be understood. The use of the toolkit is not about what is said, but about what is listened to.

Keeping a simple message is important:

- Put radiation risk into context
- Focus on benefits of Class 7 goods
- Provide examples of the impact of denials

The initial items in the toolkit demonstrate some of these features.

Example of content

A simple story sheet has been developed to present such a concept, and this has been translated into multiple languages. The task was to provide a tool which could be used in an Asian setting. The tool provided made use of a format which was more familiar in an Asian setting than a Western, African or Latin American setting. The premise here is that the form of the message can be important to ensuring effective delivery.

The message presented is simple, and can easily be used as the basis for verbal communication. It can also be translated easily and at very little cost.

Get Informed

The first section of the message is to advise people that they should base their reaction to the carriage of radioactive material on knowledge rather than suspicion. This opens the door to explaining the facts about radioactive material

Protect Yourself

The second part of the message is related to the facts about radioactive material. It shows that, in the same way you need to protect yourself from the sun's rays, you need to protect yourself from radiation. The ability to use the sun as a comparison means the communication can cover issues such as time, shielding (shade), source strength (noon against evening sun) and so on as simple comparisons.

Save Others

The final aspect of the message to provide emphasis on the fact that there is a requirement called "justification", that any use of radioactive material permitted by regulation is beneficial to mankind. This can cover the wide use of radioactive material in medical procedures that are likely to be important to every person (either the listener or a person in their immediate family are likely to need such material).

Being able to present a focused message such as this in a format that suits the audience, in a language that is familiar to the audience is important. The toolkit is intended to ensure this simple focused message can be delivered wherever needed.



Figure 1. A simple graphic

CONCLUSIONS

All organisations use communications in pursuing their objectives, but the extent, skill, and conviction with which they use them varies enormously. The basic premise in using such things is that they are a cost-effective means of creating awareness of products and services of which potential customers would otherwise be ignorant. They can also be used to instil - and alter - attitudes towards anything from rocket engines and breakfast cereals to political parties and vodka. In creating awareness and changing attitudes, those who pay for communication programmes to be deployed on their behalf generally seek to affect behaviour.

The success or otherwise of such programmes depends on a variety of factors, but principally on the relationship between the product or service offered and the requirements of the potential customer. If the audience is wholly ignorant of a product that genuinely fills a long-felt need, then a communications campaign that draws attention to such a product is likely to prove a success. If, on the other hand, a campaign draws attention to something that is no different or better than anything else on the market, it is unlikely to cause products to fly off the shelves.

The skill of the communications team in both cases lies chiefly in:

- Understanding the “selling points” of the product or service it is trying to help promote and the corresponding wants and needs of the audience. This provides the key to the best way of selling the service
- Dramatising the agreed message in a way that will catch the attention of the audience.

As might be supposed from the above, the overall requirement of the communications is to draw attention to the positive role played by RAM in society, and – as a consequence – to the necessity of transporting such materials round the world. The more focused the communication is, the better it works. Hence the focused message contained in the toolkit:

- Get Informed
- Protect yourself
- Save Others

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