

PA STRATEGIES IN KOREA

J. K. Chung

Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute, Korea

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of promoting nuclear public acceptance in Korea is to secure necessary sites for construction of large nuclear facilities in a timely manner. Another important purpose is to maintain a good neighbor relationship between the operator of nuclear facilities and local population. To promote better understanding about the nation's peaceful nuclear programs to the general public is another facet of nuclear information activities. However, opposition by the local population living around the nuclear facilities has always been aggressive. The primary concern of the local population is basically focused on the financial issues. Professional nationwide anti-nuclear groups are abetting the local population directly but with fabricated information in order to increase psychological fears. In an effort to compensate for the psychological and sociological burdens of the local population, the Korean government arranged legal provisions. To this end, beginning in 1990, community support programs have been implemented. As the nation's nuclear power program expanded, anti-nuclear activities also became very active. Public information programs should be expanded. Some highlights of public acceptance programs of the nuclear industries are 'Go and Meet' rather than 'Come and See', 'Act rather than react', 'Proper messages to proper target groups', 'Maximum use of the third party communicators', and so on. An orchestrated effort among the nation's nuclear industries is essential to the successful implementation of the PA strategies.

1. WHY PA ACTIVITIES ARE NEEDED

Korea is a small country in the Far East. The total land space of Korea is approximately 110,000 square kilometers. But the population density is very high. At present, the whole population of Korea is recorded as some 45 million. Korea is a mountainous country. More than 70 per cent of the total land is occupied by mountains. Only some 25 per cent is available for industrial, agricultural and housing purposes. Considering these unfavorable facts, it is difficult to secure necessary sites for new industrial complexes including nuclear power stations. The so-called "not in my back yard" (NIMBY) syndrome has become one of the reasons for the difficulties.

At present, in Korea, a total of 12 nuclear power plants are in operation while six additional plants are under active construction. These 18 plants are stationed at four different sites throughout the country. These sites were secured a long time ago. Each site accommodates four to six plants. And there is not sufficient space is available for construction of new plants in the future.

According to the recent Korean government's mid-term nuclear power program, it is planned to have 10 more operable plants by the year 2010 in addition to the plants currently under construction. Where will the new candidate sites be located? Korea needs a site for a radwaste disposal facility. Korea also needs another nuclear research center to accommodate a new research reactor or a demonstration reactor. Where will the sites be?

Several years ago, the government had surveyed candidate sites for the construction of nuclear power plants. Opposition by the local population was extremely strong. Miss Lulu (Locally Unwanted Land Use) and Mr. Nimby contributed greatly to the opposition. Nationwide anti-nuclear environmental groups

always encouraged the opposition. In this regard, obtaining acceptance for the nation's nuclear programs became one of the most important issues of the day.

2. REAL INSIGHT OF OPPOSITION

Why does the public oppose nuclear energy? It is said that radioactivity could seriously harm human beings and the environment. They say when an accident like Chernobyl occurs, that many people will die meaninglessly and the environment will be seriously harmed. They insist that even during the normal operation of nuclear power plants, radioactivity could leak out accidentally and this will absolutely destroy their agricultural products and fishery farms. They also argue that childhood leukemia and anencephalic births will be increased. There are many other arguments that the public, particularly the local people, are raising. Are these real reasons for opposition? Nuclear issues in this modern society are no longer scientific or technological issues; they have become completely socio-political issues.

3. THE MAIN PURPOSE OF NUCLEAR PA ENDEAVORS

The main purpose of Korea's nuclear public acceptance endeavors is to secure necessary sites in a timely manner. Another important purpose is to maintain a good neighbor relationship between the nuclear industry and the local population living around the nuclear facilities.

It is, however, noted that the primary concern of the local population living around the nuclear power plants is basically focused on the financial issues. They ask for financial compensation from the utility and the government, insisting that their agricultural products and fishery farms are being destroyed by the radioactivity and by the water discharged from the nuclear power plants. Professional anti-nuclear groups are abetting the local population with fabricated information and groundless rumors in order to deepen psychological fears of the villagers. The nuclear industry, together with the government, is campaigning with correct information programs but this is only one good part of promoting the nation's nuclear power programs.

In order to compensate for the psychological and sociological burden on the local population, the Korean government prepared a legal back-up measure to provide financial support to the neighboring communities. To this end, in 1990, the so-called "Community Support Law" was promulgated. According to this new law, a certain amount of funds has to be put aside out of the total electricity sales from the previous year. At present, 0.3 per cent of per KWh electricity sales is being reserved for various community support programs. Villages or counties within 5 km distance from the power plants benefit from the "Community Support Fund".

4. VARIOUS COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

There are two different types of community support mechanisms: direct and indirect. Direct support means support of the local community with a certain amount of money annually for a fixed purpose. As previously explained, a special law has been arranged in order to create the fund.

Indirect support includes all kinds of taxes to the local government (local autonomous body) by the nuclear industry (mainly by the utility). Spending of the salaries of the utility's employees in local communities is also regarded as indirect support. The utility company's purchase of equipment and materials is also regarded as indirect support.

There are four major direct support projects presently being implemented based on the "Community Support Law". They are:

- 1) Neighborhood Income Increase Project
- 2) Public Works
- 3) Educational Project, and
- 4) Public Information Project.

In addition to these projects, neighborhood welfare promotion programs, local industrial company support programs, electricity rate discount programs for local communities, and support of special programs that the local community has long wished for can be implemented.

The local communities benefit not only during the construction period (approximately seven to eight years), but also during the operation period. During the construction period, more support programs are carried out. During the operation period, the equivalent of \$1 million is provided annually for all communities of the four nuclear power plant sites.

5. WHAT KIND OF PA PROGRAMS ARE STRESSED?

The basic philosophy in recent years has been “Act Rather Than React”. Four target groups are particularly underlined. They are the media, politicians, religious leaders, and women.

The basic approach is “Go and Meet” rather than “Come and See”. Street campaigns, advertisements on the street, in the subway, on TV and radio, newspapers and magazines with nationwide circulation have been emphasized. A ‘Speakers Bureau’ has been set up within KAERI/NEMAC and KEPCO with frameworks for open debate, public hearings, briefings, presentations to the target groups and to the local population.

Lectures at public meetings, workshops or training courses are greatly encouraged. For example, KAERI/NEMAC and KEPCO/OKAEA lecture teams have eagerly participated in various workshops, seminars, training courses at the police academy, firefighter’s academy, public servant’s training center, journalists’ training centers, military staff’s academy, consumer protection workshops, and of course to schools. Wherever the audience is, nuclear speakers are there.

The media should be given top priority in the endeavors of nuclear public information. In some areas, it is believed that the media has always been a burden and caused pain for the nuclear industry. The media has always been less tolerant of nuclear issues. The media has a belief that the nuclear industry always disregards the right of the general public to information. On the contrary, the nuclear industry believed that the media is always looking only for sensational items and exaggerating nuclear issues beyond the truth. A deeper gap between the media and the nuclear industry has been created during the past. It is necessary to close this gap.

The nuclear industry, after suffering greatly from the media recognized the necessity of providing every detail of information in order to promote better understanding about nuclear power. The nuclear industry began to provide immediate, timely, proper, understandable, detailed and correct information to the media. The relationship between the media and the nuclear industry has gradually been improved. Seminars for reporters, chief editors, editorial writers, TV and radio program producers and so on have been eagerly arranged. Visits to nuclear facilities at home and abroad by the journalists have been strongly encouraged. Maximum use of the readers’ corner of newspapers has also been encouraged. The contribution of articles by third-party communicators (e.g., professors, medical professionals, leaders of womens’ associations) to newspapers and magazines on behalf of the nuclear industry has been very effective. It is hoped that the media in their reporting of nuclear issues should recognize first the national interest. In the meantime, the nuclear industry must try to meet the needs of the media in fulfilling the right of the general public to information.

6. THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION

In October 1993, a Korean gallop poll company undertook an opinion survey on nuclear energy. Following are some of the findings:

- Over 80 per cent answered that nuclear power was needed to feed industrial development and improve living standards. In 1989 it was 73.4 per cent and in 1991 it was 85.7 per cent. However, this time over 80 per cent support is remarkable. A lot of people realize the fact that nuclear power provides almost half of the total electricity generation in the country.
- Regarding more construction of nuclear power plants, 74.4 per cent of the general public expressed support. However, only 54.5 per cent among the local population living near nuclear power plants supported additional construction.
- 59 per cent of the general local population expressed opposition to the construction of nuclear power plants in their neighborhood. But, interestingly, 67.6 per cent of the local population opposed the construction of a radioactive waste disposal facility in their neighborhood.
- It is also interesting that among the list of unwanted facilities as a neighbor, a radwaste disposal facility ranks first (54.8 per cent), followed by a household garbage dump (24.7 per cent), a chemical plant (20.7 per cent), a nuclear power plant (20.1 per cent), a crematorium (19.2 per cent), a sewage treatment plant (14.4 per cent), a cemetery (12.3 per cent), an airport (9 per cent), an LNG storage facility (6 per cent) and a petroleum storage facility (0.9 per cent).
- The local population showed different figures. The most unwanted facility was a radwaste disposal facility (60.4 per cent). The next was nuclear power plant (34.0 per cent), a household garbage dump (32.3 per cent), a crematorium (21.4 per cent), a chemical plant (11.8 per cent), and so on, followed. It is noted that a lot of people demonstrated extremely conservative attitudes towards new facilities with which they have had no experience, notwithstanding the safety and benefits.

7. INSIGHT OF ANTI-NUCLEAR GROUPS

Currently, there are some 70 individual anti-nuclear groups in Korea. They can be categorized into three groups, namely: professional groups, supporting groups, and local resident groups. The 'Korea Federation of Environment Movement' is regarded as one of the extremely militant anti-nuclear groups. The Chairman of the Federation is a dissident lawyer, a university president and a novelist (women's). The professional anti-nuclear groups strongly demand that the government shut down operating nuclear power plants, stop further construction and cancel the radwaste disposal plan. But it is believed their ultimate target is to oppose the existing system, to eliminate all foreign forces in Korea, to expel multi-national enterprises, and to establish a unified Korea on the peninsula. It is noted that most of the core members of the Korean professional anti-nuclear groups are anti-system dissidents who always present themselves as real democratic pioneers.

Supporting groups consist of mainly young anti-system fractures. Young medical doctors, young Catholic priests, young church ministers, young Buddhist monks and so on insist that they stand for the poor, the oppressed and the distressed. These groups express full support to oppose nuclear programs whenever even small incidents occur.

Solidarity groups are less militant. But whenever nuclear issues are related to their business, then they support anti-nuclear activities. Some of the consumer protection groups and, womens' groups belong to this category.

The local population is very influential in opposing nuclear programs. They protest the construction and operation of nuclear facilities in their neighborhood. Their main interest is focused on financial compensation or relocation programs. They usually oppose in order to get more financial benefits.

8. ARGUMENTS

The following are some of the main arguments raised by anti-nuclear groups. They are practically all conventional arguments.

- Nuclear power plants can produce nuclear weapons-grade plutonium.
- Nuclear power plants, whether they are LWRs or RBMKs, are explosive like nuclear bombs.
- Operators can make errors. No perfect safety can be guaranteed. Korea's nuclear power plants can explode like Chernobyl.
- No safe management of nuclear waste is guaranteed. Spent nuclear fuels can contribute to nuclear proliferation.
- Nuclear facilities are threatening human health and destroying the environment, including the ecological sphere.
- Low level workers at nuclear facilities are always over-dosed because radiation releases are not controlled.
- Nuclear power is more expensive than other means of power generation. Although the nuclear proponents are insisting on the economic reasons, the figures are completely false and groundless.
- The reserved margin of electricity generation is too high. The utility company constructs unnecessary nuclear power plants for its own benefit.

These are some typical arguments that the anti-nuclear groups intentionally use. Besides these arguments, the Korean anti-nuclear groups particularly spread such groundless rumors as:

- Illegal bribery during the course of introducing nuclear power plants from larger countries.
- Anencephalic births, childhood leukemia, retarded and crippled offspring of workers at nuclear facilities because of radiation. Several workers have already died because of an over-dose of radiation.
- Other advanced countries are canceling, closing and shutting down nuclear power plants. The advanced (developed) countries are trying to sell nuclear power plants only to less-developed countries in order to protect their own nuclear-related industries.

There are also totally unreasonable arguments raised by the anti-nuclear groups. They claim that their anti-nuclear movement aims to cope with three inconsistencies that the Korean peninsula is currently facing:

- Firstly, the anti-nuclear movement is an anti-USA movement. In order to become an independent and self-standing nation, all US military forces should be withdrawn from the Korean peninsula.
- Secondly, the anti-nuclear movement is a democratic movement. Since nuclear power plants have been introduced into Korea against people's opinions and rights, they are completely against democratization. Introduction of foreign nuclear power plants meant the clandestine sale of people's survival rights to foreign powers.
- Thirdly, the anti-nuclear movement is a peace movement which aims at reunification of the Korean peninsula. In order to fulfill a peaceful reunification, all foreign forces should be expelled.

9. CONCLUSION

It is no secret that Korea has a growing appetite for nuclear power. In order to implement the nation's nuclear power program successfully, it is of utmost importance to gain the public's understanding and acceptance. Nuclear public information efforts should be greatly stressed. An orchestrated effort by the government, nuclear-related industries, academic circles, and citizens' groups are greatly needed. Proper counter-measures to act against anti-nuclear activities should be developed and fully applied. The anti-nuclear movement has trans-boundary effect. Likewise, nuclear PA endeavors need trans-boundary cooperation.