

What Does Canada's F-35 Fighter Jet Have to Do with Me? You'd be Surprised!

Jim Cairncross

James Cairncross & Associates

ABSTRACT

The Auditor General's Performance Audit earlier this year of the F-35 "next generation" Fighter Jet Program has significant application in the nuclear industry - the attributes and mechanics of such performance audits and reviews are equally as applicable there. The review of the F-35 Jet Fighter Program illustrates many of the important points raised in last year's CANDU® Maintenance Conference (CMC 2011). It also reinforces the focus of the SGC 2012 Conference which is on 'Issue Identification & Definition' and on '...what needs attention'.

As the CMC 2011 Conference highlighted and this year's conference is reinforcing, there needs to be a process to address execution-process issues that is:

- Transparent/ Independent/ Pro-active
- Rigorous and serves the interests of the ultimate guarantor
- Appropriately timely, and
- That uses process-assessment 'tools' well-established in the nuclear as well as other industries

For these discussions our interest is not in 'financial audits' or 'project management overviews', but in 'execution-process audit' capability for specific processes – an audit that can verify that the particular process can be 'done-right, done-once' - that being the only means of ensuring that cost and performance goals are achievable. While the approach and objectives of the F-35 Program audit may not be exactly the same as what we are talking about here, there is much to learn from the Auditor General's review.

This presentation touches on the following subjects and how they are relevant to any refurbishment or new-build project in the nuclear industry:

- What were the objectives of the F-35 Fighter Jet project review?
- What was the scope and approach to the review?
- What criteria were used to assess due diligence?
- What issues were identified and defined?
- What conclusions and recommendations arose from the review?
- What can we learn and apply from the review of the F-35 Fighter Jet Project?

Regardless of the details of the particular approach, the message we need to get from a discussion such as this is that a successful and cost-compliant outcome depends entirely on the satisfactory execution of each and every detail. No amount of high-level oversight can prevent individual process steps from going wrong – only good solid step by step assessment using proven tools such as FMEA (failure modes and effects analysis) can do that. And no amount of cooperation and good will can achieve the objectivity of an independent audit that is done on behalf of a project's guarantors.