

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY

CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARDS

CREATED BY:

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Energy production is associated with environmental impacts. Structures for community involvement have not kept pace with this progress. This creates a situation in which vital decisions concerning operation and cleanup are determined by corporations and regulators rather than by the communities most effected by these industries. Citizens depend on democratic structures to enable them to influence events that vitally affect them. The cleanup of nuclear facilities exemplifies this problem. An ecology of democracy must develop for citizens, scientist, workers, and local government representatives to work with corporations and regulators to resolve the issues involved in the cleanup of nuclear facilities.

Given the inability of the federal government or the nuclear industry to “solve” the disposal of high-level nuclear waste, communities find themselves in the unenviable position of having high-level nuclear waste dumps located locally for indeterminate periods of time. In many communities the problem extends to low-level waste, with many states hosting nuclear facilities without contracts or compacts with disposal facilities in other states.

It is essential that communities affected by nuclear facilities have the ability to participate in matters that affect them. Passive community participation in which limited information is fed to citizens to allay their fears is ineffective. Citizens need a substantive role in order to clarify, negotiate and protect their community's interests. Historically intimidated by technological issues, citizens were relegated and relegated themselves to this passive role leading to the undermining of the democratic process.

We propose the formation of site specific Advisory Boards as a mechanism to ensure greater community participation. The Board would meet regularly to give meaningful input into decisions concerning health and safety. Boards would function to educate their communities to the technology that exists in their neighborhood and its effects and advocate for their communities interests with regulators and corporations. Although advisory boards are relevant to all stages of nuclear power production, it is especially relevant to site cleanup.

Purview of Board:

The purview of the Board would be determined by the Board after its inception. Regulators would function to advise communities about the possible issues relevant to the process. For decommissioning it would occur before the Post Shut Down Analysis Report (PSDAR- decommissioning plan) was written, possibly when the reactor announced closure, or at the application for the “possession-only” license.

- Monitoring and negotiating transition activities
- Monitoring and documenting of current leaks and contamination pathways
- Initial closure and decommissioning activities
- Site surveying
- Fuel storage
- Historical documentation

Participants:

Stakeholders should represent the diverse interests in the community. Efforts must be made to reach out to the community to bring in minority points of view and minority groups who are often excluded from public participation. Stakeholders could include but not be limited to:

- Public interest groups and local representatives in the tri-state community
- Local government and state representatives
- Reactor representatives: blue collar and management
- DPH: monitoring and environmental health
- NRC/ DOE

Framework and context:

The Board would function as an educational instrument for the community requiring the Board to educate itself and the community. It would negotiate with the utility, state and federal regulators on behalf of the community's needs. It would create its own rules of order and conduct. Methods of accountability would be developed based on performance. It would hold regular meetings open to the public. A public comment period would be provided. The Board would issue reports on its work.

Issues for the Board to address:

- How to meet the needs of the community?
- How to clarify the health and safety needs of the community?
- How to function in an advisory capacity?
- How to educate the community concerning health and safety issues?
- How to represent the community's interest to other stakeholders?

Essential elements for the Board:

- Democratic process
- Inclusive: effective outreach program developed to reach stakeholders
- Creation of formalized group
- Independent facilitation
- Decision-making by consensus with ability to vote if agreement is unable to be reached
- Educators and consultants
- Mutual respect maintained

Potential Issues of Concern:

The Board should determine the issues of concern to the community. These will vary with individual sites. The Board may determine that issues relevant at the inception are no longer relevant. Through education, the Board may realize other issues are their primary concern. Therefore the Board should be seen as an experimental process rather than a rigid, unchanging structure.

Issues of importance to the Board:

- DECON (rapid dismantlement) versus SAFSTOR (long-term on-site storage)
- Monitoring of radioactive releases
- Contamination and cleanup
- Corporate accountability for funding, remediation and eventual release of site
- Preparation for decommissioning: economic impact /social impact
- Hardened monitored retrievable storage for irradiated fuel
- Radioactive waste releases and shipments
- Component removal
- Monitoring
- Worker & public exposure
- Groundwater contamination
- Site release criteria and future use

Membership Selection Process:

The selection of the members of the Board should entail a democratic process. A respected and neutral local body in the community should convene the stakeholders after a determination that an Advisory Board is needed. The logistics of defining a selection process for Board members should be developed from this convention. Board membership acceptance should include a commitment to training on the issues (both scientific and technical) that the Board will address during its convening. The Board should include a diverse array of community voices and concerns.

Board should include but not be limited to:

- representatives from towns in contamination pathway
- representatives of public interest groups in the community
- ex-officio: NRC, DPH, DOE, EPA
- sustainable development specialists

Education and Training:

Scientists and technologists should function as advisers.

Issues of concern include:

- clarifying alternatives and determining whether the Board is appropriate
- help community determine organization to convene Board
- use of citizen experts
- diverse scientific views represented
- open dialogue
- use of position papers, videos, TV, media, etc.
- computer provided with access to NRC documents

Technical Assistance:

The Board must receive adequate funding to function. Funding should be provided in a timely fashion. Since there is the potential for the community to feel intimidated and inferior due to their inability to contribute monetarily to the project, the community should provide services that contribute to the functioning of the Board. These services could include meeting space, an office, computer, secretarial services, etc. Should the Board be dead-locked, a negotiator should be available to attempt to resolve differences.

- funding for board to provide community education
- funding for technical experts
- funding for facilitation
- funding for negotiator if needed
- funding provided by: corporation, NRC, DPH, DOE and community