

The Forum on Stakeholder Confidence celebrates a decade of work

by C. Pescatore, C. Mays and D. Diaconu

Since its foundation in 2000, the NEA Radioactive Waste Management Committee (RWMC) Forum on Stakeholder Confidence (FSC) has fostered constructive dialogues and interactions with hundreds of interested parties in radioactive waste management, ranging from specialists and academic researchers, national and local politicians to local stakeholders and associations. Many of those partners came to Paris in September 2010 to participate in the colloquium “Looking Back, Looking Forward in Stakeholder Engagement”. This Ten-year Anniversary Colloquium as well as the FSC’s eleventh regular meeting on the following two days were open to all interested parties.

This article describes the Forum and the online reports in which learning is shared. It highlights the two major topics discussed at the Colloquium and reviews the joint evaluation made there of FSC achievements. Finally, it points to the directions selected for a new decade of work.

The FSC – a sustained experiment, an online resource

The FSC was created by the NEA in 2000 to promote the sharing of international experience in addressing the societal dimension of radioactive waste management. The FSC explores means to ensure effective dialogue amongst all stakeholders and to strengthen confidence in decision-making processes and socio-technical systems of radioactive waste management. The working definition given to the term “stakeholder” is “any actor – institution, group or individual – with an interest or with a role to play in the process.”

The Forum is composed of designated representatives from 16 NEA member countries. They are mainly government policy and regulatory officials, R&D specialists, implementers and industry representatives, although other profiles are present as well. The Forum is assisted in its work by academics (notably social scientists) inside and outside the fields directly concerned with radioactive waste management. Good relationships have been formed with representatives of regions and local communities who share an interest or stake in the topics discussed. Opportunities to participate include attendance at the national workshops, community visits and case study presentations at the regular

meetings, and contributions to desk studies and online consultations.

Through these varied, participative learning activities, the FSC has documented a wealth of experience told in many voices. This ongoing record benchmarks practice, and allows progress and change to be assessed. Study reports, proceedings of workshops and topical sessions, and two-page summary flyers are available online at www.oecd-nea.org/fsc.

A new document is the “Ten-year Record of Learning” which serves as an index to the themes approached and the people who contributed. FSC work has canvassed many questions and issues concerning the management of various categories of radioactive waste and the diverse solutions envisaged. Its scope and experience extend beyond geological repositories. Feedback from professionals and practitioners indicates that many of the FSC lessons are pertinent outside the area of waste management. The FSC online library is thus a precious resource, for its breadth, consistency, the broad participative basis on which the work rests, and its utility in addressing socio-technical decision-making in general.

Ten-year Anniversary Colloquium

The Ten-year Anniversary Colloquium held on 15 September 2010 was the occasion to take stock of FSC achievements, to conduct a multi-stakeholder discussion of two important current themes and to gather guidance on new directions to be taken by the FSC in the coming years.

* Dr. Claudio Pescatore (claudio.pescatore@oecd.org) is Principal Administrator for Radioactive Waste Management and Decommissioning at the NEA, Ms. Claire Mays (claire.mays@oecd.org) is a consultant to the NEA and Dr. Daniela Diaconu (daniela.r-diaconu@gmail.com), who provided input to this article, works at the Institute for Nuclear Research (INR) Pitesti in Romania.

Building a durable relationship between the host community, the facility and the major institutional players with quality of life in mind

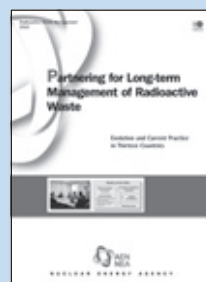
The FSC has broken away from traditional institutional discourse in suggesting that radioactive waste management facility siting is not about “acceptance” by a local community. Instead, FSC members are convinced that a facility should be embedded in a viable, long-term societal project, aimed at “ownership” and focused notably on the sustainable well-being of the host communities. Among the important features in creating such a project is the actual relationship formed among the stakeholders, and the symbolic relationship they will form with the site and facility. Prof. Erik van Hove of Antwerp challenged the Colloquium audience to consider today’s contradictory social situation: the higher economic development of society should offer opportunities for happier life, yet at the same time there is perhaps more loneliness and empty existences than ever before. He pointed out how the FSC’s proposal to give added community value to radioactive waste management is one way of addressing such imbalances.

Among the local representatives who took the floor were Catarina Blom of the Uppsala Regional Council (Sweden) and Mayor Kris van Dijck of Dessel (Belgium). Ms. Blom pointed out how politicians become mediators between the needs of technical researchers and the population; addressing waste management in a democratic manner reinforces democracy overall. Mayor van Dijck shared Belgium’s experience, showing that it is very important to involve people in the socio-technical decision-making, but that special instruments have to be created to support their engagement. Essential conditions in relationship-building are communication, correct information, a focus on safety planning and assurance of new jobs in a new industry. A repository should represent a profitable investment for the next generations, and local funds should be negotiated in this regard.

Partnering for long-term management of radioactive waste

Early in 2010, the FSC issued a significant report (NEA, 2010) and summary flyer on the ways in which partnerships have been formed and conducted in 13 countries. The partnership approach is a collaborative working relationship between the community and the main developer of a radioactive waste management facility. Relevant levels of government, from local to national, may be involved either directly or indirectly, which adds confidence that future decisions or recommendations by the partnership will receive due consideration at higher levels. Other institutions may also play a role in the partnership. The formats chosen for partnership operation (permanent or temporary working groups, panels, etc.) and the outputs it targets (design plans, recommendations to elected or administrative authorities) are

Recent publications of the Forum on Stakeholder Confidence



- *More than Just Concrete Realities: The Symbolic Dimension of Radioactive Waste Management.*
- *Partnering for Long-term Management of Radioactive Waste: Evolution and Current Practice in Thirteen Countries.*
- *Radioactive Waste Repositories and Host Regions: Envisaging the Future Together (Workshop Proceedings, France).*

NEA News articles

- “Partnering with stakeholders in radioactive waste management”.
- “Geological disposal of radioactive waste: records, markers and people”.

The FSC also offers several two-page summary flyers, most in English, French, Japanese and Spanish.

All are available online at www.oecd-nea.org/fsc.

set through legally binding agreements or through less formal arrangements. Overall, the partnership approach contributes to transparency and can support accountability in decision-making. Most importantly, it reflects a determination to empower communities in decisions that may affect their future.

At the colloquium, a critical look was taken at partnership, examining whether this governance tool is widespread and successful. In general, support was found and the conditions for achieving co-management were highlighted. The EC-funded COWAM (Community Waste Management) programmes have investigated and proved the capacity of social groups to create competence in assessing potential repository impacts and to analyse its strategic value. Serge Gadbois of Mutadis presented a stakeholder assessment of how the Aarhus Convention could support society to engage in such collaborative decision-making. Institutional and local members of different partnerships from Belgium, France, Hungary, Slovenia and the United Kingdom showed that there are common concerns: not negotiable are safety and security, benefits to the community, correct information and access to knowledge. Throughout these examples, there are similar expectations as well as frustrations regarding the institutional processes.



Technical visit during the October 2004 FSC workshop.



Participants at the Sixth Forum on Stakeholder Confidence in November 2006.

Joint assessment of the FSC as a framework for learning

All FSC contacts were invited to evaluate the past decade of work and to provide guidance for the next. A survey was available online throughout the summer of 2010 and was completed by 64 stakeholders. While many stated that they belong to an institution with an official role in radioactive waste management (RWM), they did not emerge as a majority. Among the wide range of stakeholders who answered the survey, two groups were most strongly represented: implementers and operators, and interested citizens. The survey asked how people had learnt about the FSC, which themes are most pertinent, which publications are most appreciated, which are the most effective learning approaches applied by the Forum and which ideas have people taken away. Suggestions on improving the FSC and its service to stakeholders, as well as for new activities and themes, were also collected.

The survey results and the collection of reports and material available on the FSC web page, benefitted from an outside and independent analysis. Teacher/researchers from the University of Versailles and Oxford pointed out that the FSC corpus explores a large range of methods, engaged a broad spectrum of problems and addressed the main characteristics of the waste management process: patience, the long-term dimension, costs, people and skills. FSC procedures and reports provide an excellent resource base for teaching and training in that everything is very well documented, representing multiple learning pathways and offering solutions to a class of sensitive problems and to contradictory aspects of the problems. Five dozen suggestions were made for new FSC explorations, including on the stepwise approach, knowledge maintenance and transfer, participation fatigue, expectations regarding participation processes and the stability of decision-making processes.

A first-time visitor to the FSC stated: “The presentations and discussions in panels gave me insight into the large and productive activity of the Forum as well as the different approaches to public involvement in decision-making processes in countries either already having a history (Finland, France, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom...) or just paving now (Italy, Poland) the way towards a democratic process in radioactive waste disposal implementation. All presentations reflected the need for dialogue and transparency, the need for a democratic framework, the need to understand the public’s concerns and requirements for authorities. The colloquium dialogue extended to the national scale in many NEA member countries.”

Reference

NEA (2010), *Partnering for Long-term Management of Radioactive Waste: Evolution and Current Practice in Thirteen Countries*, OECD, Paris.