Country Report at FNCA Public Information KL, Malaysia Meeting (October 2002)

Korea

Public Nuclear Information Activities in Korea in 2001-2002

1. Basic Nuclear Policy

The core nuclear legislation of Korea, the Atomic Energy Law, dates back to March 1958. The next year, in 1959, the present Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) was established based on the Law and efforts to promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in Korea began. KAERI is the nation's center for such endeavors. KAERI website is www.kaeri.re.kr.

The Atomic Energy Law has been amended extensively many times. In 1994, it was extended to include the adoption of an Integrated Nuclear Promotion Plan every five years. The first Plan was made in 1997. It was the government's intention to reflect recommendations from the Plan in establishing its nuclear promotion policy. Last year, in August, the second Plan was formulated and the Korean Atomic Energy Commission adopted it. The government will again reflect recommendations from the Plan when establishing revised nuclear promotion policy that will be effective from 2003.

The main point of the Plan again stressed the importance of obtaining public's acceptance in implementing the nation's nuclear programs together with encouraging other nuclear research and development programs. Openness and transparency were the major strategy for obtaining the public's acceptance. Community support programs are advised to continue. Functions of nuclear industries for public nuclear information are recommended to further strengthen. The Korea Nuclear Energy Foundation (KNEF), formerly Organization for Korean Atomic Energy Awareness (OKAEA), is requested to supplement the public information activities of the nation's nuclear industries. KNEF website is www.knef.or.kr.

2. Government Control

The activities of the nuclear industry in Korea are regulated by two high-level bodies; the Atomic Energy Commission and the new Nuclear Safety Commission, and by two government ministries; the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy (MOCIE). For further information, visit MOST website www.most.go.kr and MOCIE website www.mocie.go.kr, respectively.

The Deputy Prime Minister for finance and economic planning chairs the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The Commission consists of 7 members, including the Chairman: the Minister of Science and Technology, the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Energy, the president of the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO), and individuals from industry, the universities and research institutes appointed by the President of the Korea on the recommendation of the Chairman.

3. Nuclear Safety Committee Functions

The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) is invested with vast powers. Its role in nuclear safety regulation has been strengthened by the setting up of the Nuclear Safety Committee (NSC). The minister's responsibilities include securing a desirable environment for the promotion of science and technology, financial support for national research and development projects, establishing training programs for highly qualified scientists and engineers, and international technical cooperation. The Minister of Science and Technology is directly responsible for two agencies: the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) and the Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety (KINS). KINS is responsible for assisting MOST in its licensing and regulatory activities, with particular attention to the protection of public health and the environment.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy (MOCIE) is concerned inter alia with the application of policies for the rational use of energy in accordance with the recommendations of the ARC and for the supervision of electricity supply. It works closely with other government ministries in developing electricity policy and in the updating every other year of the Long-term Power Development Plan.

The Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) reports directly to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Energy. KEPCO has several subsidiaries; the Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power Company (KHNP), the Korea Power Engineering Company (KOPEC), the KEPCO's Nuclear Fuel Company (KNFC), and the Korea Power Service Company

(KPS). The KEPCO is a major shareholder in the heavy plant supplier Doosan Heavy Industries and Constructors.

4. Integrated Nuclear Promotion Plan

The Atomic Energy Commission of the Korean Government adopted 'The 2nd Integrated Nuclear Promotion Plan' in August 2001. The Korean Nuclear Society (KNS) with full capacity of the nation's nuclear professionals formulated the Plan. According to the Atomic Energy Law (as amended in 1995), it is required to establish an Integrated Nuclear Promotion Plan every 5 years. The 2nd Integrated Nuclear Promotion Plan is designed for 2002-2007.

The 1st Plan was formulated in 1997. The Plan was the basis for establishing the nation's new nuclear promotion policy. Recommendations from 'The 1st Integrated Nuclear Promotion Plan' were extensively reflected in the policy. The Government needed to have a modified policy in consistent of rapidly changing technological as well as socio-political climate and in consistence of the 5-year rolling plan mandate. The 2nd Plan was thus prepared.

For the formulation of the 2nd Plan, as done previously, almost 150 experts from the government, research organizations, academic circles, and industrial sectors related to nuclear programs actively participated. The final draft of the Plan was then submitted to the Atomic Energy Commission for adoption. It was unanimously adopted in August 2001. This Plan will be reflected in establishing the nation's revised overall nuclear promotion policy for 2002-2007 cycles.

5. Need to expand public information programs

'The 2nd Integrated Nuclear Promotion Plan' basically reiterated the important role of nuclear energy for assuring stable supply of energy, for contributing to solve environmental problems, for enhancing industrial competitiveness and for improving public welfare. The Plan also strongly emphasized the need to expanding public information programs. It is urgently needed to secure sites for additional construction of nuclear power plants and for permanent disposal low-level radioactive wastes. To do so, it is increasingly need to have well established public information programs.

The Plan was comprised of two parts. Part-1 explained the current status and future prospect of nuclear development and utilization in Korea and diagnosed the target for the nation's nuclear promotion policy. The Part-1 also recommended the basic direction of fulfilling its target. Part-2 described recommendations with strategies for promoting various nuclear programs. These included how to obtaining public acceptance, how to encourage nuclear utilizations, how to achieve industrial development, and what will be a more effective infrastructure for the promotion.

6. Public Information Plans

With regard to the increasing public awareness, in the Plan, the first priority was again given to the classical effort of 'Nuclear Programs together with the Public'. The government's open policy in nuclear decision-making process and in administration was regarded as extremely important. These endeavors were particularly regarded important for obtaining public acceptance about the nation's nuclear programs. The Plan also indicated that such endeavors should be based on the fundamental concept that would respect the public's 'Right to Know'. The Plan also emphasized that local communities nearby large nuclear facilities should have special fringe benefits than other communities. The government was again advised to provide necessary financial compensation for possible psychological burdens of the local population. Consensus showed that the government has unlimited responsibility for matters that the public's expresses great concerns.

Various 'to do list' to implement the 'Hand-in-Hand Nuclear Policy' was recommended. The 'Hand-in-Hand' idea was that the government including nuclear industry and the public should take hands together for successful implementation of the nation's nuclear programs and for preparing second nuclear Renaissance that would be expected to come eventually. Follow-up actions were suggested. Some suggestions were in fact already being implemented while others would need to be further elaborated on. Also, some suggestions were quite new approaches.

The first recommendation, however, was to strengthen public information activities, in general. This has been a traditional recipe. Some action items suggested under this category were rather old-fashioned. But, they would be regarded as still effective. Improving media relations was a regular recipe to the public information table.

Another recommendation was to strengthening the ‘Nuclear Safety Day’. In Korea, from 6 years ago, one day in September (normally one day in the first week) has been designated as Nuclear Safety Day. The day originated to commemorate the Atomic Energy Law Promulgation Day in 1958. Various events have been programmed for improving about safety awareness on this particular occasion. Some of the highlights were street campaigns (distributing information sheets to people on the street, occasionally with VIPs joining), a speech contest by high school students, and nuclear power plant open house. The commemoration ceremony has usually been highlighted by the participation of high-ranking government’s officials such as the Prime Minister. This participation exhibited the government’s strong pledge to support the nation’s nuclear programs.

7. Openness and Transparency

The other recommendation was strengthening proper and immediate release of nuclear information to the public, including the media. To this effect, a real-time information release system by nuclear power plant operators was suggested. The primary purpose of this program was to carry out environmental radiation monitoring on a real-time basis. It is noted that during the past, environmental radiation monitoring was not on a real-time basis. The information has usually been provided somewhat late, especially when an incident occurs. Whether the local population is aware of the consequences of radiation monitoring or not, it would be the operator’s responsibility to provide a real-time monitoring result to the public.

Another important recommendation was to establish a ‘Radiation Monitoring Team’ together with ‘Concerned Citizens’ Groups’. Participation of concerned citizens’ groups, particularly from the local community, on issues regarding the operation of nuclear power plants has been regarded as an important step to promote the public acceptance. To this end, a suggestion was made to establish a ‘Local Environment Radiation Monitoring Team’ that would basically be supported by the local government. It is hoped that this team could contribute to a more credible relationship between the nuclear industry and local communities.

Public information programs have been well implemented during the past many years. However, some of them worked out successfully and some did not. There is a growing recognition that the success or failure of the nation’s public information programs can

largely be influenced by social, cultural, traditional and even political situations. Therefore, the plan recommended that the nuclear community should also seriously consider societal and political issues when dealing with the public information programs.