

IRPA
Guiding Principles
for
Radiation Protection Professionals
on
Stakeholder Engagement

Introduction

During the 11th Congress of the International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) held in Madrid in May 2004 there were considerable discussions on the benefits of involving all relevant parties in the decision-making processes related to radiological protection. It was agreed that this involvement, briefly described as "Stakeholder Engagement", should play an important and integral part in these processes. A need was identified for guidance to be produced to help radiation protection professionals to understand the objectives, requirements and demands of stakeholder engagement, encourage participation and provide a framework for establishing a constructive dialogue with other stakeholders.

As a result of these discussions a group of professionals from the French, Spanish and UK IRPA Associate Societies decided to collaborate in organising a series of workshops to exchange information especially on case studies of how stakeholder involvement had been carried out in different fields of radiation protection. The workshops were held in Salamanca, Spain, November 2005, Montbéliard, France, December 2006 and Oxford, UK, December 2007 and resulted in a draft version of the Guiding Principles. During the course of this development the progress was systematically reported to meetings of the IRPA Executive Council and at IRPA Regional Congresses (Paris, France in May 2006, Acapulco, Mexico in September 2006, Beijing, China in October 2006, Cairo, Egypt in April 2007 and Brasov, Romania in September 2007).

The draft version of the Guiding Principles was sent to all Associate Societies for comments in Spring 2008. After revision by the Executive Council the Guiding Principles were presented at the IRPA 12 Associate Societies Forum and, after discussion and with some amendments, endorsed by the Forum. The Guiding Principles were finally adopted formally on 18 October 2008 in Buenos Aires by the IRPA Executive Council.

These Guiding Principles are intended to aid members of IRPA Associate Societies in promoting the participation of all relevant parties in the process of reaching decisions involving radiological protection which may impact on the well being and quality of life of workers and members of the public, and on the environment. In promoting this approach, radiological protection professionals will aim to develop trust and credibility throughout the decision making process in order to improve the sustainability of any final decisions.

Principles

Radiological protection professionals should endeavour to:

1. Identify opportunities for engagement and ensure the level of engagement is proportionate to the nature of the radiation protection issues and their context.
2. Initiate the process as early as possible, and develop a sustainable implementation plan.
3. Enable an open, inclusive and transparent stakeholder engagement process.
4. Seek out and involve relevant stakeholders and experts.
5. Ensure that the roles and responsibilities of all participants, and the rules for cooperation are clearly defined
6. Collectively develop objectives for the stakeholder engagement process, based on a shared understanding of issues and boundaries.
7. Develop a culture which values a shared language and understanding, and favours collective learning.
8. Respect and value the expression of different perspectives.
9. Ensure a regular feedback mechanism is in place to inform and improve current and future stakeholder engagement processes.
10. Apply the IRPA Code of Ethics in their actions within these processes to the best of their knowledge.

Guidance

Principle 1

Identify opportunities for engagement and ensure the level of engagement is proportionate to the nature of the radiation protection issues at stake and their context.

The primary purpose of engagement is to contribute to decision making on radiological protection measures so that;

- the measures are more widely understood and respected;
- the measures are optimal and work in practice across a broad range of foreseeable situations;
- the measures are tailored to the local context (social, economic, environmental etc);
- the measures will continue to be effective and have credibility for some reasonable period of time.

Engagement will add real value to the decision-aiding process and its outcome but its extent and nature need to be proportionate to the radiation protection issues and concerns at stake. This includes being realistic about the co-operation that can be achieved and about the resources and time that might need to be expended on interacting with the more challenging stakeholders. The more complex the radiological protection problem and the more serious the risk, or even the perception of the risk, the greater is the justifiable investment in engagement.

In identifying opportunities for engagement it is important to be aware of changing societal expectations. Changes such as increasing awareness about the risks associated with some activities, concerns over environmental deterioration or loss of public confidence in some organisations are all likely to broaden or shift the range of stakeholders that need to be engaged.

Principle 2.

Initiate the process as early as possible and develop a sustainable implementation plan

Feed-back experience has shown that involving stakeholders, as early as possible, in decision-aiding processes will generally improve the mutual understanding of the situation, and therefore may avoid reaching a deadlock at a later stage. Although it may increase the duration of the process, involving stakeholders will generally facilitate better cooperation between all participants and lead to more acceptable and robust decisions.

At the early stage of the decision-aiding process, involving stakeholders will give the opportunity to develop together a sustainable plan in terms of scope, objectives,

timetable and milestones, deliverables, knowledge production, financial support etc. In order to improve the sustainability of the process, a reasonable approach, shared by all participants, should be adopted when defining this plan. The process has to be proportionate to the realities of the situation, and take into account the stakeholders' time and opportunity to participate according to their particular circumstances. Finally, it has to be kept in mind that it will be necessary to revise and adapt the plan as the situation evolves.

Principle 3

Enable an open, inclusive and transparent stakeholder engagement process

Openness, inclusiveness and transparency, which are interrelated, should constitute the essence of a successful stakeholder engagement process and should always be present. They are the basis for understanding, creating confidence in the process and promoting it. They may be supported by collectively agreed rules and mechanisms for their assessment.

The process should include all the relevant stakeholders, extending representation beyond the obvious candidates to all those perceived to have a share in or an impact associated with the risks of the endeavour under consideration. Different expertise and sensibilities will generally enrich the process and give more validity to the results.

All the issues entering into the decision should be considered, with openness, to identify, select and discuss any associated uncertainties.

During the process, it is important to share the information needed to build a collective understanding of the problem, starting in particular with risk communication. The flow of information should be quick, concise, clear to all and honest (in terms of accuracy, uncertainty etc.). By default, information should be accessible to all, but recognising that some information truly requires protection. Rather than withholding information on grounds of personal or national security or confidentiality, it is preferable to have it presented in a different way, rather than agree its omission.

It would be helpful to build, grow, review and maintain a common knowledge pool, identifying a responsible 'gatekeeper' or 'custodian' for the knowledge pool who is trusted and respected by all parties.

Principle 4

Seek out and involve relevant stakeholders and experts.

A key part of decision-aiding is to be very clear over what is the issue in question, the scope of the problem and the factors that may be relevant. Inherent to this process is the need to identify those who can and should contribute; in short, ensuring that an appropriate diverse range of views are included. The radiological protection professional can help to promote this approach, as radiological protection is, by its nature, an interdisciplinary science.

There is a need to reach out to other disciplines and stakeholders, making them aware of the issues under consideration. Without this first step relevant factors may not come to light, undermining the validity and sustainability of any decisions. For example experts in one discipline may not be aware of knock on effects in other areas. Similarly if the net of consultation has been set wide enough to elicit “no comment” replies, this is useful information to support the bounding of the issue. Bringing together all the diverse views may be an iterative process, particularly for large scale decision making that may involve socio-economic factors. Thus it should be accepted that the initial set of stakeholders may not be the final set. The process can be a dynamic one with stakeholders joining, but also leaving, throughout.

There is a need to have respect for information and knowledge gained through individuals’ experience as well as that from scientific and technical experts. Some issues, particularly high profile ones, bring with them stakeholders with significantly different points of views. It is important that there is engagement with, rather than avoidance of, these different groups. Inevitably there will be conflicting views and information. How these are evaluated within the decision-aiding process is a separate but important element (see principles 3 and 5), however it is clear that obtaining a full spectrum of views is important.

Principle 5.

Ensure that the roles and responsibilities of all participants, and the rules for cooperation are clearly defined

A clear definition, at the beginning of the process, of the roles and responsibilities of the different categories of participants (for example, experts, authorities, sponsors, lay persons, decision maker versus decision taker, ...), is important to obtain a shared understanding of what is expected from each and the extent of the influence they may have. In addition it will be helpful to set out clearly the rules under which cooperation can be achieved. A clear delineation of the consultation phase and the decision phase, as well as a clear understanding of where individuals’ responsibilities and accountabilities begin and end is essential to clarify the conditions of the engagement. Potential conflicts of interest should be declared by all parties. It may be helpful for radiological protection professionals to make reference to their own Code of Ethics

One of the objectives of stakeholder engagement in a decision-aiding process is to promote dialogue and mutual understanding, but not necessarily to reach a consensus on all aspects of the situation. It is thus important to preserve the autonomy of the different categories of participants concerning their points of view or their evaluation of the situation. This delineation of roles is a key element to create the conditions for the participants to contribute to the improvement of the evaluation of the situation and the radiation protection options.

Beyond clarifying the roles and responsibilities, sharing the rules of cooperation between the participants will also favour the success of the process.

Principle 6

Collectively develop objectives for the stakeholder engagement process, based on a shared understanding of issues and boundaries.

The need for a collective approach to developing process objectives is implied by application of the other principles. Principle 2 talks of the development of a sustainable plan, Principle 4 of identifying the responsibility of contributors and of scoping problems and factors, and Principle 5 of the need to co-operate.

Lack of collectivism disenfranchises stakeholders, whereas working alongside each other allows a tight group to emerge which is then capable of explicitly defining the process objectives. The group is then in a position to validate these against its shared understanding of issues and boundaries, as well as to collectively agree the scope or remit for the work.

Once the objectives are identified in principle then the discussions can extend to ensuring that they are refined in the light of the resources available. The realism brought about by this dialogue invariably leads to more harmonious working by avoiding feelings of frustration with the process that might be perceived as more imposed than negotiated.

Principle 7

Develop a culture which values a shared language and understanding, and favours collective learning.

In order for all stakeholders to fully appreciate the factors entering into the decision they must be able to understand what is being said. This understanding can be seriously compromised by the use of jargon and technical language as well as acronyms and abbreviations. The radiological protection professional should be motivated to develop a "common language" sufficiently precise scientifically not to offend the various experts but also sufficiently rooted in common, every-day experience to be meaningful to all those involved. Part of this approach is likely to

involve formal and informal training of stakeholders leading to the creation of a shared knowledge base incorporating those technical concepts essential to a full understanding of the issues.

Principle 8

Respect and value the expression of different perspectives.

It is important that each participant in the process recognises their own and each others' uniqueness, and, because of this, is aware that other participants have different backgrounds and sensibilities and, therefore, may view issues from different perspectives.

Participants should be aware that some may be experts in their own field, and the integration of their views is an important step in the process, whilst accepting challenges to expert opinion. Evaluation of uncertainties in the assessments where expert opinion is divided should be undertaken in an open, accessible and clear manner. Experts should recognise the limits of their mandate.

Respect for one another's view encourages a wide range of thoughts and ideas which can be evaluated as a whole during the engagement process. This acceptance of diverse perspectives, thinking and values has the potential to enrich the process, providing that the process is controlled such that any entrenched views and ideologies, if present, are managed by agreed mechanisms. In a similar way, seemingly radical or novel opinions should not be dismissed out of hand, but evaluated with respect in the same way as other ideas. It is important that each individual can see their own contribution in the record of the meetings.

Participants should be aware that rational thought, respect and acceptance of opinions will tend to be challenged or obscured when discussing issues which are emotive, or issues which have attracted significant media or political interest. Efforts should be made if this happens to restore the desirable climate of mutual respect and cooperation.

Principle 9

Ensure a regular feedback mechanism is in place to inform and improve current and future stakeholder engagement processes

When engaging with stakeholders an opportunity should be provided for both the stakeholders and those responsible for the process to give feedback on the approaches and tools used and on the outcomes. This serves to inform and improve ongoing processes as well as influencing how future processes should be conducted. The following types of criteria might be included in the evaluation: appropriateness of the terms and timing of engagement, the quality and appropriateness of the information provided; comprehensiveness of the issues that were addressed; inclusivity in terms of the number and diversity of stakeholders involved and the nature of that engagement; practicability and feasibility of the eventual outcomes.

Stakeholder engagement commonly involves a series of meetings, discussions and other types of face-to-face encounters. These provide continuous learning opportunities to be discussed by the group at the end of each meeting, whereby agreements on improvements in the management of subsequent meetings are agreed. It should be recognised that implementation of changes may require additional resources and so any improvements agreed upon must be realistic and achievable.

When a stakeholder engagement process comes to an end, it is important that those responsible for the process make the results known to all those who participated. If these results do not reflect the recommendations or findings from the stakeholders, those responsible must offer an explanation to the stakeholders for any deviation from what was agreed. In this way, the feedback of results and decisions will help to maintain confidence in the process.

Tangible improvements in stakeholder engagement resulting from the establishment of a constructive feedback mechanism will contribute to a more sustainable process, which could serve as a role model for future engagement. Dissemination of the lessons learned, achievements and how challenges can be met should be carried out as widely as possible among the radiological protection community.

Principle 10.

Apply the IRPA Code of Ethics in their actions within these processes to the best of their knowledge.

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, the radiological protection professional should be bound by the IRPA Code of Ethics or an equivalent National Code.