

## SOME THOUGHTS ON RADIATION PROTECTION ISSUES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Important National Issues

A matter of great importance and concern in the U.K. is the imminent introduction of legislation to control the use of ionising radiation. The problems associated with this introduction are not new, and since the implementation of new laws in 1974 dealing with the whole field of occupational hygiene, considerable thought has been given to the difficult process of extending control from relatively simple industrial uses to other fields such as scientific research in medicine. In the 10 years that have elapsed since the introduction of the laws, there have been several attempts to produce comprehensive legislation which have been abandoned because of the appearance of new external factors such as the Directive of the European Communities and the advice given in ICRP 26. The current exercise, which threatens to be brought to fruition in the immediate future, is the result of several years of consultation and is based on a working party convened by the responsible government authority. The group has contained representatives from employers, workers, and individual radiation protection experts and has produced consultative documents which have been published, inviting comments from interested parties. At the same time a National Advisory Body has produced notes for guidance on how different aspects of the legislation should be implemented.

Current Involvement of BRPA

Recognising the danger that even well-intentioned legislation can inhibit productive and scientific activity, BRPA has been fortunate in having some of its members sitting on the working party drafting the regulations. Thus it has been able to keep its membership informed of the trends and implications of the proposed legislation. Additionally there has been feedback to the working party of the need for scientific consistency and flexibility.

The difficulty has been clearly seen that in attempting to legislate for all aspects and all uses for ionising radiations, the proliferation of detail can reduce the law to nonsense. Sanity and flexibility can only be preserved by permitting the application of professional judgement in individual situations, and BRPA has become even more aware of the need to enhance the esteem and practice of the Radiation Protection profession so that this can be available to all.

In extending professional advice outside the area of legislation, the society have published two "Manuals of Good Practice" concerning the Radiation Protection of the patient during medical investigation. The first of these on Diagnostic Radiology was published in 1980 and enjoyed success both in this country and abroad. This year a sequel was published on Nuclear Medicine and a similar success is expected.

Future Objectives

This society is a federation of interests which range across the discipline of operational health physics, medicine and education. In identifying the need for a profession of radiation protection, it has become very aware of the

importance of reconciling sectional interests if a profession of radiation protection is to be recognised externally. There is a widespread fear that so different are the aspects of radiation protection in, say, hospitals compared to Nuclear power stations, that there could never be an interchange between staff and therefore never a corporate identity. Some of the respected professions using radiation in their work have little interchange between different aspects of the work and this has not appeared to be a disability. This society has however an interest in obtaining more recognition from the public for persons able to give professional advice. It has striven to reduce the internal disagreements that exist (often publicly) in its various sections. Just as engineers have separate sectional interests, for instance mechanical, electrical, chemical, etc., similarly radiation protection has operational, medical and educational divisions that are separate but should be regarded as of comparable importance.

Another vital factor is that it is important that professional advice should be given with a mind to financial consequences. It does not need an expert to get 100% safety by closing down production altogether. Our art must be to obtain maximum safety with minimum expenditure and interruption of work, and to show the public that safety can sometimes pay for itself.

#### The Role for the IRPA

Members of IRPA will have no doubts as to its value in fostering the interchange of information internationally. An important bonus is the human relationships that are generated in the process. A vital role which has emerged and should be developed is the collection and collation data on cause and affect relationships which are so important to those of us who do not have investigatory sources of our own. Finally we have become increasingly aware that the IRPA should be eternally vigilant about legislators. Their *raison d'être* is to control everything and they are very easily attracted to new sources of data with the intention of using them for purposes which were not intended scientifically.