

tions in Sweden in 1976, and demonstrations at nuclear plant sites in the USA and other countries during the 1970s and 1980s were not limited by geographic boundaries.

In March 1979, INFOWIRE achieved a new level of maturity as a result of its coverage of the accident at Three Mile Island (TMI). Previously, it had primarily covered anti-nuclear demonstrations, media activities, incidents at plants, legislation, regulatory actions, and reports issued by critics. Covering TMI involved reporting the technical and radiological aspects of the accident, a new challenge. Seven years later, the communications lessons and experiences gained at TMI, as well as the network established among nuclear communicators, were invaluable in reporting on the accident at Chernobyl.

Today, INFOWIRE's scope includes anything that might generate public or media attention on the industry. It is equivalent to a newswire service. It is written specifically for the nuclear and electric utility communicator. The style is journalistic, simple, and to the point. When appropriate, it includes suggested responses to events and issues.

Over the past year, USCEA has been working to expand and modernize the INFOWIRE network. Transmission is being converted from telex to fax, which is less costly and more efficient. And USCEA is working more closely with sister organizations and USCEA members overseas in an effort to be responsive to the needs of nuclear industry communicators worldwide. Indeed, it appears that the equivalent of a worldwide newswire system will result.

USSR

Nuclear power and public opinion

Public information centres are part of new Soviet initiatives

by Vyacheslav S. Romanov

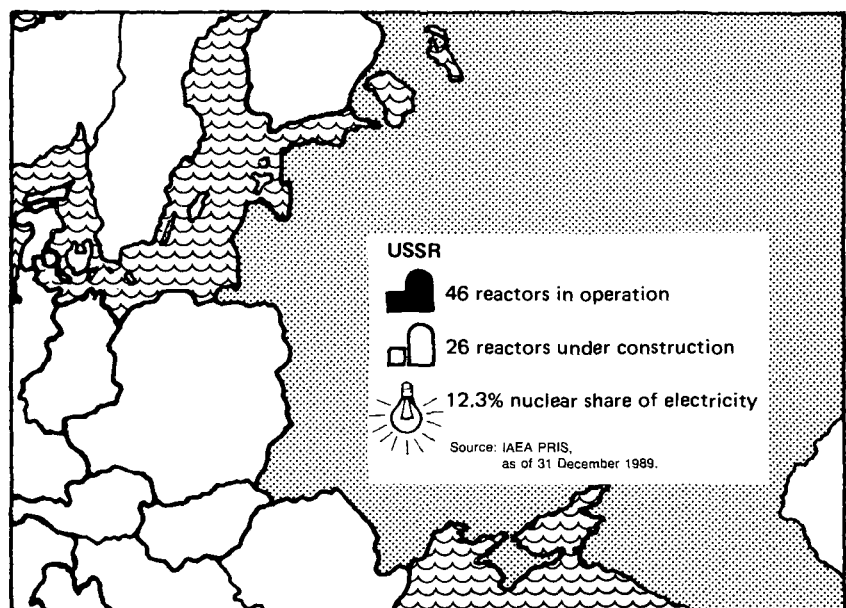
Nuclear power has come a long way since the start of trial operation on 6 June 1954 at the world's first nuclear power plant, in Obninsk. The plant was welcomed by the public with great optimism and with the hope that a new, cheap, safe and virtually inexhaustible source of energy would be available to mankind. By 1986, the installed nuclear power capacity of the USSR exceeded 27 gigawatts — almost 30% more than the total capacity of all the country's power stations in 1950.

The claims of Soviet scientists and other experts that nuclear

power was safe found a positive response. Even information published in the mass media passed unnoticed that during the period 1971–85 there had been, in 14 countries of the world, 151 unforeseen accidents of different degrees of seriousness with various ecological consequences. Indeed, even the accident at the Three Mile Island power plant in the late 1970s was not taken particularly seriously either by our experts or by our public.

The accident at Unit-4 of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 caused an emotional explosion that generated an extremely negative attitude towards nuclear power in the USSR. There was a sharp rise in public concern about the safety and ecological impact of nuclear plants. The situation was

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difficult enough already because of the ecological imbalance caused by large atmospheric releases from industrial plants burning coal and oil, and from chemical and biological plants, among others. The economic aspects of nuclear power were thus subjected to extremely critical reassessment.

The unstinting efforts of ordinary people and the marshalling of the entire national economy to deal with the consequences of the Chernobyl accident roused public opinion to such an extent that this tragic event will serve for a long time to come as the point of reference for all future decisions concerning nuclear power.

The questions that the public have placed on the agenda are fundamental issues concerning the country's whole economy. Is further development of electric power necessary at all? If there is to be an ever growing demand for electricity, how are we to satisfy it without worsening the already critical ecological situation in the country and without developing nuclear power? Will it be sufficient to concentrate all efforts on energy-saving technologies? What role can be played by the alternative sources of energy, such as wind, solar, and tidal? On these matters there are a multitude of opinions, often diametrically opposed.

Nuclear plans revised

The Chernobyl accident has already made itself felt by reducing the rate of nuclear power development in the USSR. The energy programme under the Twelfth 5-Year Plan had envisaged 41.5 gigawatts-electric (GWe) of nuclear power capacity, whereas in actual fact only 9 GWe has been commissioned in 4 years.

As of 1 January 1990, there were in the USSR 15 operating nuclear power stations comprising 45 units with a total capacity of 36.4 GWe; 34 units at 17 stations were under construction. The pro-

grammes for commissioning further nuclear capacity under the next two 5-Year Plans have been considerably curtailed. The most realistic figures seem likely to be 6-10 GWe during 1991-95 and about 10 GWe during 1995-2000. This is clear from the fact that the decision to build nuclear power plants with a total capacity of 45 GWe has been revoked.

However, if we analyse the structure of the energy balance in the USSR over the forthcoming period, we see quite clearly that it will only be during the next few years that the share of nuclear fuel can be reduced and the deficit compensated by increasing the share of natural gas.

Thereafter, as we approach the limit of economically feasible levels of oil, gas, and coal production, the share of other sources of energy will have to increase — to 13% by the year 2000 and to 22% by the year 2010. The contribution in percentage terms of such non-fossil-fuel sources of electrical energy as solar, wind, and geothermal can at best only amount to single-digit figures.

Thus, the only adequately developed and efficient source of energy that can serve as an alternative to fossil fuels during this period continues to be nuclear power. Yet there is no gainsaying the fact that further development of nuclear power is frozen in our country, and our situation is in many ways similar to that which arose in the United States after the Three Mile Island accident.

Another factor which has further complicated the situation is that competent government agencies and industrial departments had no experts in the art of public relations, while the mass media, with its predilection for sensational reporting, in fact came down entirely on the side of the opponents of nuclear power. Such one-sided coverage in the press of this crucial issue was not conducive to objective discussion or to the adoption of a balanced and reasoned stand by the majority of the population.

Responding to public concerns

In these complex and difficult circumstances the Government decided, in the autumn of 1988, to set up an Inter-Departmental Council on Public Information and Relations with a view to ensuring transparency and improving public understanding of nuclear power. The Council is composed of representatives of the USSR State Committees on the Supervision of Industrial and Nuclear Power Safety; Hydro-meteorology; Protection of Nature; Public Education; Press; Television and Broadcasting, as well as representatives of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Nuclear Power and Industry, Ministry of Public Health, Union of Engineering Associations of the USSR, and others.

The working organ of the Council is the Public Information Centre, under the Central Scientific Research Institute for Information and Technical and Economic Research in the Field of Atomic Science and Technology (TsNII-atominform). The Centre's main function is to provide public organizations and the public at large, through the mass media, with objective information on the status and prospects of nuclear power, covering problems such as safety and ecology.

Seven regional public information centres also have been established in areas where there are nuclear power plants in operation or under construction — in Leningrad, Kharkov, Gorki, Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, Kiev, and Murmansk.

At all nuclear power plants in operation and under construction, Information and Enquiry Groups have been set up to assist the public.

Range of activities

Work plans for the next few years have been discussed at the Council's meetings and a concep-

tual outline of activities has been adopted. Members representing the various committees, departments, and public organizations have taken part in the implementation of these plans.

Arrangements have been made for monthly publication in the newspaper *Izvestiya* of reports on the operation of nuclear power plants and events occurring in them. The press has started reporting the results of ecological assessments of nuclear power plant projects (South Urals and South Ukraine plants). Information about the ecological situation in different regions and the impact of nuclear power on the environment is published in the local press. The medical consequences of the Chernobyl accident in the areas affected by radioactive contamination are covered regularly.

Public information work relating to the safety problems of nuclear-powered vessels is carried out among the population and media representatives at the ports of call of such ships. In 1989 the national and local press carried 30 articles on the ecological aspects of nuclear-powered vessels, and about a thousand members of the public have visited them.

Communication research

Sociological studies are being carried out in various parts of the country with the collaboration of leading scientists and other experts (All-Union Public Opinion Research Centre, Moscow State University, Institute of Sociological Research of the USSR Academy of Sciences and its branches) in order to gain a correct understanding of the reasons for the public's attitude to nuclear power. In the first instance, studies are carried out, under the plans of the Public Information Centre, at such "hot" spots as the locations of district heating and nuclear power plants (Gorki, Voronezh, Arkhangelsk and Bryansk); at sites where nuclear power plants are already in operation or under

construction, or where siting studies are under way (Kalinin, Rostov, and Petrozavodsk); and also in Moscow and Leningrad. The first results of these studies have already been reported in the press.

In 1990 the Public Information Centre is planning to enlarge the geographic scope of its sociological investigations and to make a full study of the situation at all places where nuclear power plants are in operation, under construction, or are to be sited.

Work aimed at creating a favourable psychological climate at all operating nuclear power plants has begun. In November 1989 a training course on this subject was held at the Kola plant for representatives of the power plant information groups.

Data collection and use

The Public Information Centre collects both domestic and foreign data. Such activities are also carried out on commission for the Centre by the I.V. Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy using computers. At present, this database has more than 1000 entries. It is used by the Public Information Centre to supply the mass media, public organizations, and members of the public, as well as the regional public information centres, other information centres and information groups, with objective information on the status and prospects of atomic energy in the USSR and abroad.

In one year more than 700 items of information were sent to the regional centres, magazines, newspapers, and individuals. This material is already being utilized by the regional public information centres and the information groups at the local level. For example, it has been used in connection with conferences at Voronezh and Chelyabinsk. The database serves as a source of information for replies to letters from workers addressed to the Communist Party Central Committee, USSR Council

of Ministers, mass media, and directly to the Public Information Centre.

Drawing on the database, the Inter-Departmental Council has started publishing an "Information Bulletin" to serve as its own press organ. This is sent to public organizations, ministries, departments represented on the Council, local government bodies, all central newspapers and magazines, regional centres, nuclear power plants, and a number of enterprises in the nuclear sector. More than 30 issues have come out so far, and up to 1000 copies of each issue are printed. The Bulletin is in great demand and its circulation is growing. The publication of a weekly survey called *Po materialam pressy* (*Material from the Press*) started in July 1989.

In 6 months the Public Information Centre handled more than 1000 letters from citizens, staffs of enterprises, informal groups, and associations. Where appropriate, correspondents' letters have been answered.

Public and press contacts

The Public Information Centre is gaining experience in organizing roundtable discussions, interviews with the public, and discussion club meetings. For example, discussions have been held in the editorial offices of the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*), the monthlies *Priroda* (*Nature*) and *Ehnergiya* (*Energy*), and the daily *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* (*Socialist Industry*). Reports on these discussions have been published. There were six meetings of the discussion club of the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy and interviews with the public in Moscow, Gorki, Voronezh, Chelyabinsk, Rybinsk, Khmel'nitskij, and other places. In connection with the exhibition "Atomic Power — Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" held at Zaporozhe and the conferences at Voronezh and Chelyabinsk, there were interviews on local television.

Of great importance are the press conferences held on the results of IAEA missions to nuclear power plants and the reports on these interviews in local newspapers and magazines.

Experience shows that these forms of dialogue provide an opportunity for the supporters and opponents of nuclear power to understand each other's point of view. The recently founded Nuclear Society of the USSR is contributing to this mutual understanding.

The Public Information Centre maintains close links with central television and takes part in releases of short documentaries and TV films. A number of activities have been organized in the course of the year. A camera team of the programme "Time" filmed the opening of the exhibition "Atomic Energy". The educational and popular science programmes department prepared a transmission under the programme "Science-Theory-Experiment-Practice" on problems of the safety and economics of nuclear power with the participation of Academicians A.A. Shejndlin and B.B. Kadomtsev. The camera team of the "Kosmos" group went to Shevchenko to take location shots in preparation for the popular science film "Do We Need Nuclear Power?". A special correspondent of the central television news department paid a visit to Obninsk to check reports from members of the public alleging releases from the nuclear power plant. The conference on "Nuclear Power Supply and Ecology" (Voronezh) was covered in the programme "Opinion".

In its work, the Public Information Centre makes active use of international experience, taking part in activities organized by the IAEA and others. In 1989, as part of bilateral co-operation, meetings were held and delegations were

exchanged with France and Poland. On these occasions documentary films were made, interviews were published in the press, essential information material was distributed, and meetings and discussions were conducted with members of the public, schoolchildren, physicians, fishermen, power plant personnel, and local authorities.

The Centre has organized more than 10 meetings between journalists visiting the USSR and representatives of ecological movements, specialists, and members of the public in various regions of the USSR.

Future directions

The conceptual framework for future activities is influenced by the present situation, which can be summarized as follows:

- After the Chernobyl accident the population, including a large number of specialists and people in the liberal arts, ceased to believe in the safety of nuclear power;

- The greater part of the population does not accept the arguments of nuclear power experts;

- The volume and quality of the information available fall short of what is needed by the public in order to have a well-grounded perception of events;

- Lack of information leads to the growth of distrust;

- Under the conditions of frankness, transparency, and democratization of society, most local administrative bodies use the negative attitude of the population to achieve their own personal political ends, coming out strongly in opposition to nuclear power.

Main activities that can influence the public's future attitudes towards nuclear power are:

- Enhancement of nuclear power plant safety and provision of information on progress made in this field;

- Resolution of the scientific and organizational problems associated with the Chernobyl accident, with the widest publicity possible for the results;

- Concentration of public information activities in places where there are nuclear power plants in operation and under construction;

- Wide dissemination of information among the public by various means (articles, pamphlets, books, films, discussions, excursions);

- Involvement in the discussions of teachers, physicians, ecologists, women, and representatives of scientific, social, and religious organizations;

- Provision of regular and timely information to the public on all events that occur at nuclear power plants and on radiation levels in the region of such plants;

- Independent assessment of projects with the involvement of the public;

- Planning and implementation of economic measures in areas where nuclear power plants are located or are being built;

- Clarification of the role played by nuclear technology in the life of the community (applications of radioisotopes, robotics, vacuum technology, radiotherapy and diagnostics, and many other uses);

- Development of international co-operation in this area and participation of experts from different countries in discussions with the public; holding of annual meetings attended by representatives of public information centres from various countries with a view to exchanging experience under IAEA auspices.

