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COMMUNITY RELATIONS FOR THE TRANSPORT  
OF TMI-2 CORE DEBRIS

T. A. SMITH

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## COMMUNITY RELATIONS FOR THE TRANSPORT OF TMI-2 CORE DEBRIS<sup>a</sup>

T. A. Smith  
Idaho National Engineering Laboratory  
EG&G Idaho, Inc.  
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83415

### ABSTRACT

This paper describes community relations for the transport of Three Mile Island Unit 2 core debris, before and during the first two years of the campaign. The author defines community relations as interactions with groups or individuals to influence public perception. Members of Congress, state and local officials, news media, special interest groups, and private citizens are included in the definition of community. The paper discusses issues of concern to the community, level of interest generated by the transport campaign, events that kept community interest focused on the campaign, and communication techniques employed to provide the community with factual information and to generate public confidence. Finally, the paper describes lessons learned from the community relations effort.

### INTRODUCTION

The transport of Three Mile Island Unit 2 (TMI-2) core debris has been one of the most ambitious shipping campaigns in the history of the nuclear industry.<sup>1</sup> Because of the notoriety of the accident at TMI in 1979, the campaign received extensive public scrutiny.<sup>2-3</sup> Activities involved interactions with a community that included members of Congress, state and local officials, national news media, special interest groups, and private citizens. Program Management and Public Information personnel from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and its contractor EG&G Idaho, Inc. responded to hundreds of inquiries. Information on the transport campaign was provided to the community during numerous meetings, through correspondence, and by telephone.

The campaign involved rail transport of damaged TMI-2 fuel and core materials. Shipments originated at TMI near Harrisburg in south-central Pennsylvania, crossed more than 2,400 miles of track through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, and Idaho, and terminated at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (INEL) of DOE, near Idaho Falls, in southeast Idaho. The campaign started in July, 1986 and is expected to conclude in 1989.

Before or during the campaign, public officials, news media, special interest groups, and private citizens expressed concerns about route selection, legality of shipments, purpose and necessity of shipments, safety

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Figure 1. The first shipment of core debris leaves TMI in July, 1988.

of the specially-designed rail casks, local and federal emergency response capabilities, shipments through large cities during rush-hour traffic, and general rail safety.

In anticipation of extensive public scrutiny, DOE implemented community relations procedures to provide information to the public. Successful community relations were achieved mainly through use of the following concepts and techniques: (1) developing and maintaining good communications and relationships with state and local officials, as well as with members of Congress; (2) providing briefings to interested parties and attending meetings to answer their questions; (3) establishing a single-point contact for inquiries from news media and the public; (4) responding factually to inquiries in timely fashion; and (5) providing packages of information to interested parties.

#### BACKGROUND

In accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DOE and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), formalized in 1982, DOE agreed to acquire the TMI-2 core for research and storage.<sup>4</sup> Defueling began in 1985. In 1986, DOE completed procurement of two NuPac 125-B Rail Casks, designed specially for transport of the TMI-2 core debris.<sup>5</sup> A third NuPac 125-B Rail Cask was leased by GPU Nuclear from Nuclear Packaging, Inc. in 1987.

The NuPac 125-B Rail Cask, certified by NRC, is a double-containment cask system with separate and independent inner and outer "leaktight" vessels.<sup>6</sup> An inner vessel contains seven debris canister cavities and has a one-inch thick stainless steel shell. Seven loaded debris canisters are loaded into the inner vessel for transport. The outer vessel is a composite stainless steel and lead assembly which envelops the inner vessel. The outer vessel wall is seven inches thick. Attached to each end of the outer vessel are overpacks made of stainless steel and filled with foam. Each cask is mounted on a dedicated 160-ton capacity rail car.

In 1986, arrangements were finalized with Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) and Union Pacific Railroad to transport the rail casks by exclusive-use trains. The route comprised mainline track of Conrail and Union Pacific. Shipments originated with Conrail, which hauled the rail casks from TMI to East St. Louis, Illinois. In East St. Louis, the rail casks were transferred to Union Pacific, which hauled the casks to INEL. Major cities along the route included Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Kansas City. The shipments passed through hundreds of other local jurisdictions.

The campaign required transport of nearly 300,000 pounds of core debris, which equated to about 50 cask loads of material. Shipments consisted of one, two, or all three casks in exclusive-use trains. Trains consisted of locomotive and caboose, cask/flatcars, and gondolas or hoppers used as buffer cars. Buffer cars were positioned behind the locomotive, in front of the caboose, and between each cask/flatcar. After the first two years of the program, 70 percent of the core had been transported in 16 shipments comprising 31 cask loads of material.

#### COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGY

Several months before the start of the campaign, DOE and EG&G Idaho developed a Community Relations Plan.<sup>7</sup> Objectives were defined as follows: "The objective of this plan is to establish procedures and guidelines for communicating information to news media and the public on the TMI-2 fuel shipments. The objective of the communications effort is to communicate information in a straightforward and professional manner so that the public will have an accurate and full perception of the program. The communications effort is intended to eliminate or minimize concern and confusion which might result from lack of information, or from incomplete or inaccurate information."

The following techniques were outlined in the Plan:

- (1) A single-source contact was appointed to serve as spokesman to news media, special interest groups, and the public, and to assist with communications with state and local officials. A community relations professional from the Public Information Office of EG&G Idaho was appointed full-time to the position several months before the start of the campaign. The spokesman was provided with a complete background concerning technical issues and political sensitivities of the campaign. The spokesman attended all important meetings between DOE and EG&G Idaho and officials from GPU Nuclear, Conrail Union Pacific, or the states. Also, the spokesman was allowed easy

access to personnel of DOE Headquarters in order to obtain policy information firsthand.

- (2) Informational meetings for public officials were planned in order to give state and local officials complete and factual information on the transport campaign. DOE decided to hold informational meetings only upon request because of the expense and complexity of providing meetings for all public officials along the shipping route.
- (3) Press conferences were planned in Pennsylvania and Idaho to provide news media with factual information regarding the campaign.
- (4) Press releases were issued before the start of the campaign. The Plan specified that press releases would be issued during the campaign if necessary.
- (5) Informational packages were prepared. These were distributed by the hundreds both before and during the campaign. The informational packages contained both technical and nontechnical descriptions of the rail casks and transportation plans, a DOE policy booklet, and information on handling, examination, and storage capabilities at the INEL.

The techniques were mainly reactive in nature, but allowed interested parties easy access to information about the campaign. The techniques were successful; however, additional techniques were implemented in 1988 to address concerns raised primarily in the St. Louis area. Accordingly, the Community Relations Plan was amended<sup>8</sup> in March of 1988 to allow DOE and EG&G Idaho a more pro-active role in disseminating information on the campaign.

The amended Community Relations Plan provided for: (1) Developing and/or maintaining good communications and relationships with concerned state and local officials; (2) Initiating and conducting briefings for Public officials or news media; and (3) Initiating and/or attending public meetings.

#### COMMUNITY INTEREST

Initial interest by news media in the transport campaign was on a national level. During July of 1986, when shipments from TMI began, nearly 200 news media inquiries were handled by the spokesman. While national interest subsided after the first shipment, news media at locations along the route continued to cover the campaign. After several shipments, interest from news media was prevalent in the Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Idaho Falls areas. Total news media contacts for the first two years of the program numbered more than 500.

Figure 2 illustrates the number of news media and non-news media contacts handled from April, 1986 through August, 1988. Non-news media contacts include telephone and personal contacts with state and local officials, DOE-HQ, other federal agencies, Congressional staff, industrial representatives, special interest groups, and private citizens.

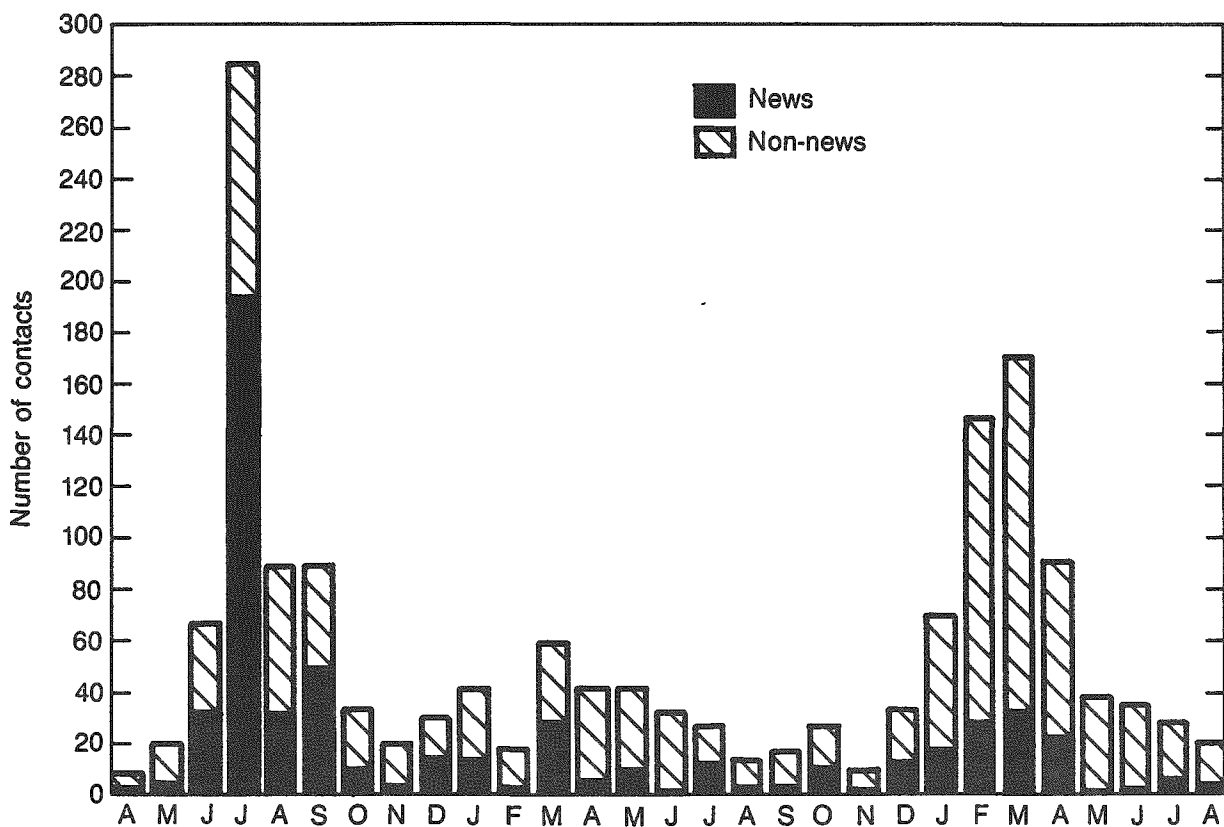


Figure 2. News and Non-News Media Contacts, April, 1986 - August, 1988.

Data in Figure 2 show that news media and non-news media interest was highest at the beginning of the campaign, declined thereafter, and increased again several times during the campaign. Those later increases occurred in conjunction with certain events that were sometimes directly related to the transport campaign and at other times were only indirectly related. Interest was generally higher during months when shipments were made, and was occasionally higher during weeks immediately preceding federal and state or local elections.

High interest levels in July 1986 resulted from public meetings held before the start of the campaign, a press conference, issuance of press releases, and the first shipment. News media interest increased in March, 1987 after a train hauling TMI-2 core debris collided with an automobile in St. Louis. This event also led to increased interest by several members of Congress and some local officials.

Interest continued at a high level in April and May, 1987 because of a derailment of a Conrail freight train near Pittsburgh, which led to the evacuation of approximately 15,000 people. Although that accident was not directly related to the TMI-2 shipments, it occurred on track used for those



shipments and led to speculation by the public that the accident would have been worse had it involved a train carrying TMI-2 core debris. An increase in news media attention was manifest in July, 1987, the one-year anniversary of the start of the campaign, when special interest groups in St. Louis and Pittsburgh held protest rallies to commemorate the event.

News media and non-news media interest increased again in December, 1987, when the first triple-cask shipment passed through St. Louis during rush-hour traffic. Interest continued at a higher level in January, 1988, when a Union Pacific freight train derailed along the route used by the TMI-2 trains.

In February, 1988, a TMI-2 shipment passed through St. Louis with an improperly placarded buffer car. That buffer car, placed on the train in East St. Louis, contained a load of lime, but carried placards identifying the load as calcium carbide, a potentially flammable and explosive chemical. The incident led to protests from special interest groups, increased news media coverage, and inquiries from local officials and several members of Congress. In March, 1988, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) began an investigation into the incident and DOE made several concessions because of Congressional requests and public concerns. Those concessions included postponing further shipments until completion of the FRA investigation, avoidance of shipments through St. Louis during rush-hour traffic, making triple-cask shipments only in order to reduce the total number of shipments, and placing representatives of DOE on trains for all future shipments.

In April, 1988, the FRA investigation was completed. FRA issued a report on the incident,<sup>9</sup> and shipments were resumed. Also that month, the Community Relations Plan was amended to allow DOE and EG&G Idaho a more pro-active role in community relations. DOE and EG&G Idaho made extensive efforts to address concerns of local and state officials, members of Congress, news media and special interest groups. Efforts included: several meetings and briefings with mayors and other public officials in the St. Louis area; briefings for concerned members of Congress; briefings for news media; DOE emergency response training in the St. Louis area; and a joint meeting with several St. Louis area mayors and members of special interest groups.

A decrease in news media and non-news media interest was manifest in May, 1988. That decrease was attributed to the increase in pro-active community relations activities the preceding month. The number of Non-news media contacts was higher than the number of news media contacts from May through August, 1988 because of continuation of closer communications with state and local officials.

#### MAJOR CONCERNS AND RESOLUTION

Several issues dominated concerns raised by the community during the transport campaign.<sup>10</sup> Those concerns, and resolution thereof, are discussed below:

- (1) Questions on selection of the rail route were asked before the campaign started and continued until about April, 1988. Some parties alleged that route selection was haphazard or based on political

considerations. DOE and EG&G Idaho spent considerable time discussing that concern. Criteria used in route selection were discussed: highest quality track, shortest time in transit, shortest distance, fewest number of switches, and minimizing population where possible. Documentation on the route selection process was provided to interested parties. Explanations of the route selection process showed that politics was not a factor in picking the route.

- (2) DOE did not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the transport campaign but took exemption under categorical exclusion because the activity was bounded by previous EISs. Because no EIS was performed, some public officials and special interest groups alleged DOE was not in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. DOE explained the basis for categorical exclusion through correspondence, with a fact sheet, and at meetings. Those explanations helped to avoid several threatened court actions.
- (3) Concerns about Congressional and statutory authority for the transport campaign surfaced in early 1988 primarily because of inaccurate claims made by special interest groups. To prove statutory authority, DOE cited the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, which allowed acquisition of radioactive materials for research. To prove Congressional authority, DOE provided documentation of Congressional testimony and funding authorizations, wherein DOE informed Congress of its intent and Congress authorized expenditure of funds for the activity. By carefully explaining authority, and by providing documentation when appropriate, DOE and EG&G Idaho laid to rest most concerns on those issues.
- (4) Questions about design and safety features of the NuPac 125-B Rail Cask were raised before the start of the campaign and persisted through 1988. Most interested parties were satisfied with explanations from DOE and EG&G Idaho. However, special interest groups continued to question cask design and regulatory requirements. To address concerns on this issue, DOE and EG&G Idaho used documentation, fact sheets, videos, and plastic models.
- (5) Concerns about emergency response capabilities of federal, state and local agencies were raised in Pittsburgh area in the spring of 1987 and in the St. Louis area in early 1988. Written and verbal explanations of the capabilities and roles of emergency responders helped satisfy those concerns. DOE conducted several emergency training seminars in response to requests from members of Congress and state officials. Those seminars proved extremely beneficial in satisfying concerns.
- (6) Concerns about passage of TMI-2 trains through St. Louis during peak traffic hours became an issue in late 1987 and early 1988 after several TMI-2 trains passed through the city during rush-hour traffic. DOE agreed in April, 1988 to not move trains through the city during rush hours by modifying the transport schedule.

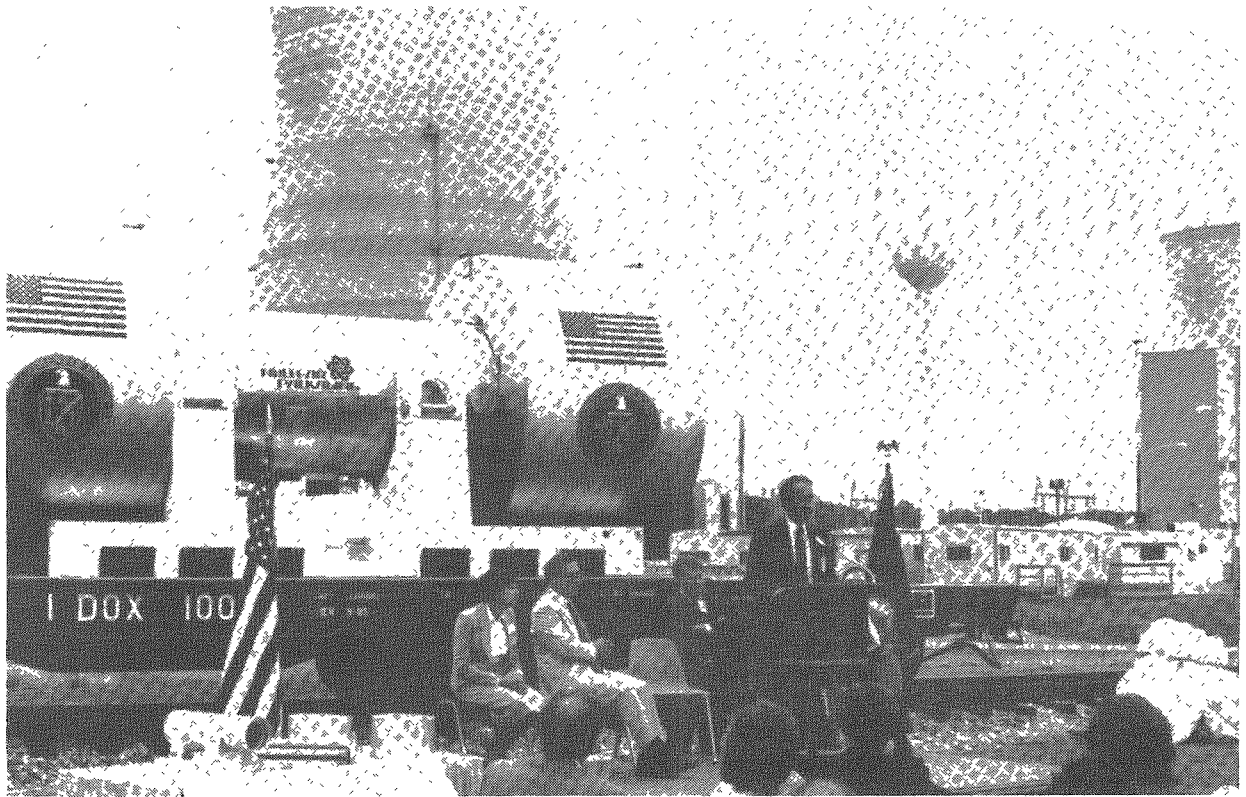


Figure 3. Briefing for public officials at TMI before start of campaign.

- (7) Questions on general rail safety were raised in the Pittsburgh and St. Louis areas in 1987 and 1988 following train derailments along the same route used by the TMI-2 trains. EG&G Idaho, with assistance from Conrail and Union Pacific, answered concerns to reassure officials and the public that rail was a safe mode of transportation. Particularly helpful were tours of rail lines, conducted for concerned officials by railroad personnel.

#### CONCLUSION

The transport of TMI-2 core debris was an activity of high public visibility. Extensive community relations work was necessary to satisfy public concerns and to convince that public that the campaign was necessary, legal and safe. Before the start of the campaign, officials of DOE and EG&G Idaho assumed that public interest would be high for the first few shipments, but would then end. Experience proved that to be an erroneous assumption. In reality, public interest increased during important events, some directly related to the program and others only indirectly related to the program. Close attention to community relations was required throughout the campaign, regardless of whether or not public interest was high or low at a given time.

By paying close attention to community relations and keeping in touch with public interest, DOE was able to resolve most conflicts and to avoid others.

In conclusion, the author believes that several important concepts and techniques were instrumental in the success of the community relations effort. Persons planning future campaigns to transport radioactive materials should consider the following when developing and implementing community relations plans: (1) Develop and maintain good communications and relationships with state and local officials; (2) Provide briefings for state and local officials, and attend public meetings when requested; (3) Designate a single-point contact as spokesperson to public and news media inquiries; (4) Respond in a factual and timely manner to requests for information; (5) Prepare informational materials for distribution to the community.

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