



State leaders discuss future DOE shipments at Kansas meeting

by Lisa R. Sattler

The spring meeting of The Council of State Governments' Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee was marked by several "firsts" as the group continued its work to prepare the region for the expected rise in spent nuclear fuel shipments and to ensure that states have a say in the process.

"The [U.S.] Department of Energy obviously is the leader [in making the shipments], but the states need to be involved as well," says Kansas Rep. Joann Freeborn, a Republican from Concordia and a member of the CSG committee. "We need to make sure the shipments pass through here not only in a safe manner, but also in the most economic way possible. We also need to have a role in educating the local public.

"And one of the more important parts also is to make sure our state and local emergency management officials are involved and prepared."

With that in mind, several committee members took the opportunity to arrive in Topeka, Kan. — the site of the spring meeting — one day early so that they could observe a joint exercise involving the state of Kansas and the DOE's Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program. The exercise — the first ever conducted outside a controlled naval or DOE site — revolved around a simulated accident in which a shipment of spent nuclear fuel from a naval vessel was struck by a stolen truck. The purpose of the exercise was to test the readiness of state, local and federal agencies to respond to such an incident.

"This is the first time we've conducted a transportation exercise as an 'away game,'" the DOE's Alan Gunn quipped during the event, noting that all other such exercises have taken place near the program's West and East coast ports.

Both the M-140 container used for shipping and the spent fuel inside are very robust and rugged, so the likelihood of a radiological release is very small. As a result, the exercise was not intended to test the responders' ability to manage an incident in which nuclear materials are released.

Instead, the state and local agencies focused on how to "effectively communicate and establish a command center linked to the Navy's emergency operations center, the state emergency operations center and the incident commander," says Frank Moussa of the Kansas Division of Emergency Management.

"The most important thing that came out of this exercise is to have the Navy understand our state procedures, and we need to understand theirs," Moussa adds.

While the exercise was the first of its kind in the Midwest, the simulated DOE shipment was not. The federal agency has shipped more than 750 containers of spent fuel since 1957. Many of these shipments have passed through the Midwest on their 2,700-mile journey to a storage facility in Idaho. All shipments from East Coast shipyards travel through Kansas City, with most heading due west across Kansas.

For members of the Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee, the real work began after the joint exercise ended. From June 15-17, representatives of nine Midwestern states met to discuss and debate ongoing projects and future plans as part of the group's work with the DOE's radioactive waste shipping programs.

Preparing for heavier workload

Among the principal accomplishments of the meeting was approval of the first revision of CSG's "Planning Guide for Shipments of Radioactive Waste through the Midwestern States," which lays out the region's recommended practices for shippers that move radioactive waste and materials through the Midwest.

Since publishing the original version in April 2002, CSG Midwest has maintained an online version of the document with updated state points of contact, fees and other important information. The recommended practices, however, have remained unchanged. In Topeka, the committee agreed to revisions suggested by the states that have experienced DOE and private shipments over the past two years.

The most significant change will add a class of radioactive materials to the scope of the planning guide. The new edition will contain specific recommendations for shipments of "highway route-controlled quantities" of radioactive materials, which are conducted by private shippers. Many people regard these materials as being more susceptible to terrorism than the government's shipments of spent fuel or transuranic waste.

The Midwestern regional committee is one of four groups that the DOE's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management has tapped to be an "anchor" in the department's collaboration with the states regarding shipments to a national repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. The significant role that the DOE has afforded the Midwest translates into a number of new substantive projects for states in this region to undertake. During the business session, members agreed to adopt a new "lead state" approach and formed new committee working groups to manage these projects.

Perhaps the most significant project on the horizon is the analysis of potential highway and

rail routes for shipments to Yucca Mountain, with the goal of identifying an acceptable suite of routes. This multiyear task will require significant coordination and interaction within and among the Midwestern states, as well as with the committee's counterparts in the other regions.

The task that generated the most interest among committee members is its work with the DOE in finalizing the department's policy and procedures for providing assistance to the states. As required under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, the federal government must provide both financial and technical assistance to the states through which shipments to the repository will pass.

The Midwestern committee previously assisted with the development of the draft policy and procedures. One year ago, the committee identified finalizing the draft policy as a high priority for the region; therefore, many states were eager to sign up for the working group that will aid DOE officials in completing this task.

In another "first," the committee approved a regional list of "key issues" associated with the DOE's shipments to Yucca Mountain. The list will serve as a "living document" to guide the Midwestern committee's interactions with other regions and the federal government.

Notable among the key issues are the region's desire to see all repository shipments conform to the NRC's regulations and guidelines. Because the DOE is not a licensee of the NRC, the department is not obligated to follow the NRC's physical protection measures, which ensure the security of the shipment while in transit between sites.

Another key issue is the matter of waste traveling by barge. The DOE's final environmental impact statement for the repository raised the possibility of spent fuel moving by barge from nuclear power plants to railheads in Wisconsin, Michigan and Nebraska. The barge shipments in Wisconsin and Michigan would travel on Lake Michigan to ports in Milwaukee and Muskegon, respectively, while the spent fuel from Nebraska's Cooper Nuclear Station would travel on the Missouri River to the Port of Omaha.

The Midwest had early on taken the position that barge shipments on the Great Lakes were unacceptable, with the states preferring to see the DOE move the waste to railheads with heavy-haul trucks. Nebraska will consider whether there is a need to expand the regional position to eliminate the possibility of shipments on the Missouri River.

The committee also agreed to amend its rules to make room for additional legislative members. With the rule change, the committee will have up to 12 seats available to legislative members, an increase of five over the current allotment. ✨

Information on the committee and its ongoing projects is available at www.csamidwest.org or by contacting Lisa R. Sattler at 920/803-9976 or lsattler@cs.org.



As part of a recent training exercise, a federal escort accompanying the shipment of naval spent nuclear fuel describes the mock accident to the Topeka, Kan., police and fire departments. (photo: Missouri State Emergency Management Agency)