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NCRP PROGRAM AREA COMMITTEE 7: RADIATION EDUCATION, RISK COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH, AND POLICY

S.M. Becker* and P.A. Locke†

Abstract—Recognizing the central importance of effective communication, education, and policy across all of the domains of radiation safety and radiation protection, the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP) established a new committee in 2013. Program Area Committee 7 (PAC 7) was created to develop projects and provide guidance on “Radiation Education, Risk Communication, Outreach, and Policy.” After identifying individuals with relevant expertise who were willing to serve, the Committee held its inaugural meeting in 2014. In 2015, the Committee increased its membership and began carrying out an expanded program of activities. One area of activity has involved providing input and feedback on risk communication issues to NCRP and other agencies. Another area of work has involved liaising with other NCRP committees (e.g., Council Committee 1 and PAC 3) to help incorporate psychosocial and risk communication issues into projects. Future efforts of NCRP’s newest PAC are expected to include the development of authoritative reports and commentaries dealing with critical issues and challenges in radiation risk communication, education, and policy. *Health Phys.* 110(2):116–117; 2016

Key words: National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements; radiation protection; risk communication; public information

INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM AREA Committee 7 (PAC 7) is the most recent addition to the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements’ (NCRP) program and committee structure. Focusing on the crucially important topics of Radiation Education, Risk Communication, Outreach, and Policy, PAC 7 was established by the NCRP Board of Directors in 2013. From the outset, the new PAC was envisioned as having a dual role: (1) an expert group that would develop and carry

out projects (e.g., prepare Council reports and commentaries) within the Committee’s subject area and (2) a body that could provide ideas, suggestions, and advice to other PACs and to NCRP as a whole. This second role stems from the fact that effective risk communication is central to all aspects of radiation safety and radiation protection.

A roster of individuals with relevant expertise was identified and invited to serve on the new PAC. An initial planning teleconference was held, and in March 2014, the first full face-to-face meeting of the Committee took place. The Committee’s membership was increased further the following year, and in March 2015, the full Committee met in Bethesda, MD, to define the PAC’s role and areas of activity, determine top priorities, and identify specific projects.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Although PAC 7 only formed and began operating relatively recently, the Committee has already become engaged in a variety of activities. One such activity has involved providing input and feedback on communication issues to NCRP and other agencies. For example, in March 2015, Armin Ansari from the Radiation Studies Branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) gave a special presentation to PAC 7 on a draft tool being developed to communicate radiation risk.

Called the Radiation Risk Scale, the tool uses colors, a simple numeric scale, and five radiation risk categories to quickly and clearly communicate information on radiation risk levels ranging from natural background all the way to levels that pose an immediate life hazard. Among the advantages of the tool are the fact that it does not require an understanding of radiation units, is simple to use, and does not require pre-incident education. During the session, Ansari discussed the draft tool as well as preliminary results from audience testing. Afterward, members of PAC 7 provided feedback on the tool and offered ideas for further outreach.

Along similar lines, members of PAC 7 had the opportunity to discuss and provide feedback to NCRP regarding planned improvements in communication and outreach. In addition, members of PAC 7 have begun working on a draft

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template for effectively incorporating communication-related topics, concerns and issues into Council reports and commentaries.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

In 2015, PAC 7 began liaising with NCRP Council Committee 1 (CC 1), which was formed to update NCRP Report No. 116 (NCRP 1993). Report No. 116 is over 20 y old, and there is a pressing need for it to be updated. CC 1, which is being co-chaired by John D. Boice, Jr., and Kenneth R. Kase, is seeking to release the new report (entitled *Radiation Protection Guidance for the United States*) by 2017. CC 1 has asked PAC 7 to assist the effort by helping to identify where psychosocial and communication issues might best be incorporated into preliminary outlines (and ultimately the report itself). To facilitate the process and to ensure effective coordination, CC 1 has requested that a member of PAC 7 also become a member of CC 1.

PAC 7 is also liaising with other program area committees. For example, PAC 3 (Nuclear and Radiological Security and Safety) currently has a project (led by Scientific Committee 3–1) aimed at developing guidance for dosimetry practices associated with response to radiation emergencies (Co-Chairs: Stephen V. Musolino and Adela Salame-Alfie). Not surprisingly, there are many risk communication dimensions and implications associated with emergency responder dosimetry. Members of PAC 7 have been liaising with PAC 3 and providing input and suggestions.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

In the near future, PAC 7 also plans to take steps that will ultimately result in the preparation of NCRP reports

and/or commentaries. The Committee has already identified two possible topics warranting attention:

1. The current status of radiation risk communication—what is known, what are the gaps, what future work needs to be done?
2. Comprehensive review of the psychosocial effects of radiation incidents—what has been learned from research and experience; what are the implications for planning, training, preparedness, and response?

Reports or commentaries on these topics would fill an important void and be useful to broad elements of the radiation protection community.

CONCLUSION

With the topics of risk communication, education, and policy central to all aspects of radiation protection, the launching of PAC 7 represents an important initiative by NCRP. Although the PAC only began operating relatively recently, it is already engaged in a variety of activities. These include providing input and feedback on risk communication issues and new communication tools and liaising with other NCRP committees to help identify where psychosocial and communication issues can best be incorporated. In the near future, PAC 7 can be expected to take steps that will ultimately result in the preparation of new NCRP reports and/or commentaries.

REFERENCE

- National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements. Limitation of exposure to ionizing radiation. Bethesda, MD: NCRP; Report No. 116; 1993.

