

Website Notes on Inaugural SAFESPUR Forum Meeting, 22 March 2006, Birmingham

This inaugural event was designed to explore what potential members of SAFESPUR would like the group to do and how they would like it to work, and to encourage them to join. Some of the fifty or so participants in the meeting were familiar with SAFEGROUNDS or SD:SPUR or both, but there were some to whom both of these learning networks were new. In recognition of this, the meeting began with some short presentations to set the scene.

The meeting was chaired by Andy Thomas of Future Solutions who, when at BNFL, was instrumental in starting up SAFEGROUNDS and then SD:SPUR. He reminded the meeting that SAFEGROUNDS began in the late 1990s as a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) initiative to produce good practice guidance for use in decommissioning nuclear sites. Its success led DTI to back the 2002 pilot project that gave rise to SD:SPUR in its present form. Both learning networks have survived the transfer of the responsibilities for nuclear decommissioning to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA). SAFEGROUNDS, in particular, has broadened its remit to include contaminated land on defence sites and is considering broadening it further (see below). Andy expects the two networks to thrive and sees SAFESPUR as good way for consultants and contractors to gain commercial advantage by using the guidance that the networks produce.

Jeff Kersey of CIRIA summarised the origins, aims and current work programme of SAFEGROUNDS. Its guidance on the management of contaminated land is primarily intended for the owners and operators of nuclear and defence sites, and their contractors and consultants, but it is open for all to use. Although the nuclear industry, the Ministry of Defence, the Health and Safety Executive and members of CIRIA provide most of the funding and contributions in kind, they do not control the agenda. The SAFEGROUNDS project steering group consists of people from a wide range of organisations, including NGOs and local authorities. There is a culture of stakeholder engagement, in which there is consultation in depth on most topics and much wider consultation when appropriate. In 2006, SAFEGROUNDS will produce new guidance on record-keeping and embark on a major revision of its land management guidance and supporting documents. As part of this revision, there will be discussion of widening the scope of the guidance so that it explicitly covers all types of site on which there may be radioactively contaminated land.

Mark Bentley of CIRIA gave a parallel summary for SD:SPUR. This is a sister network to SAFEGROUNDS and works in a very similar way. It is essentially about applying the 'waste hierarchy' to the non-radioactive and less active low level radioactive wastes that are generated when nuclear and other sites are decommissioned and restored. A major aim is to increase the emphasis on recycling, re-use and recovery of wastes. The current SD:SPUR guidance is strategic and is about identifying and assessing more sustainable waste management options, within existing frameworks such as the integrated waste strategies that are being developed at most nuclear sites. Future guidance will be more practical in nature. It will include a document on recycling waste metals; a workshop has already been held to frame the issues. SD:SPUR makes use of mainstream construction industry experience, for example that embodied in WRAP

(the waste and resources action programme). Like SAFEGROUNDS, SD:SPUR takes policy and regulatory issues forward to appropriate fora.

The next presentation was by Bob Mathews of RWE Nukem and dealt with markets for work on the investigation and remediation of contaminated land. There are two main markets for contractors and consultants: nuclear-licensed sites and other sites (defence, industrial etc). At 'other' sites the most common remediation method is 'dig and dump', because removal of all detectable contamination maximises the resale value of the land. Defence Estates owns the largest number of sites and aims to sell most of them. Many of its sites are contaminated with radium-226, which is easy to detect. The nuclear sites market is different in all respects: potential remediation methods, radioactive contaminants and contractual arrangements. Also, much of this market is currently for site investigations, assessments and planning, rather than for carrying out large scale remediation projects. There are great opportunities for innovation but, in Bob's view, to take full advantage of them it will be necessary for clients, contractors and consultants to overcome their historical secrecy about technical solutions. The NDA may need help to produce the healthy contracting market that government expects. There is also a need to clarify who will carry out stakeholder consultation on specific projects: should it be the site/owner operator or should the contractor/consultant act on their behalf?

Mark Hannan of N-ovation Ltd continued the NDA theme, using his experience in working with them and DTI, by talking about what the NDA would require from contractors and consultants in the future. He emphasised the influence that SAFEGROUNDS and SD:SPUR have had on policy-makers and regulators, and the influence that a group such as SAFESPUR could have on the NDA. The challenges that the NDA faces, and that SAFESPUR could assist them with, include introducing competition into nuclear site decommissioning, reducing costs and timescales, establishing new arrangements for managing low level radioactive waste (LLW) and engaging stakeholders without exhausting them. At present, contractors and consultants mainly need to influence the NDA itself and the 'site management companies' (SMCs). The latter provide business leadership, specify best practice and ensure innovation by the 'site licence companies' (SLCs), who hold the nuclear site licences and receive the NDA funds. It is the SLCs who employ contractors and consultants to deal with site specific issues (so-called tier 2 contractors; the SMCs and SLCs are tier 1). There will be big commercial opportunities here in the management of contaminated land and LLW. He advised contractors and consultants to form partnerships but, in these changing times, to avoid long-term commitments.

After the presentations, the meeting split into three groups to discuss the future of SAFESPUR. It ended with a plenary session in which the main points made were as follows.

- SAFESPUR is a good concept but how useful it is to participants and others will depend on the details of its work programme and exactly how it operates. There will be an element of 'try and see'.
- It should be more than a talking shop and lobbying group. It should generate business for its members and assist other stakeholders, for example, by providing

a forum for clients such as the NDA, SMCs, SLCs, Defence Estates and local authorities to have discussions with many of their main contractors and consultants at one time.

- The potential benefits of membership of SAFESPUR include: opportunities for networking; gaining rapid updates on policies, regulations, research and technologies; the ability to influence standards collectively; holding joint discussions with clients about topics of general concern to contractors and consultants; interacting with other stakeholders on topics common to SAFEGROUNDS and SD:SPUR (for example, when and how to engage with a range of stakeholders at site level).
- SAFESPUR would wish to hold meetings with and without groups of stakeholders such as the NDA, SMCs, Defence Estates, regulators and local authorities. For example, it would be useful for SAFESPUR to have an internal discussion about difficulties with NDA procurement procedures and then meet with them (and their tier 1 contractors) to try to resolve them.
- The SAFESPUR website should be developed to showcase more fully the skills and expertise that are available and provide more information to potential clients about contracting and consulting services. This could be particularly useful for clients outside the nuclear industry, such as local authorities faced with investigating radioactively contaminated land under the new Part IIA regulations.
- It would be desirable to have three or four SAFESPUR events per year. A good topic for the first one would be the government's review of UK policy for managing LLW. Participants could hear about the scope of the review and, if they wish, provide input to the consultation.

This was a very successful inaugural event that everyone found to be both useful and enjoyable. It was a fitting start for SAFESPUR.

Marion Hill