

Introductory Remarks to Western Focus Seminar

Jim Harvie
President, Canadian Nuclear Society

It's indeed a pleasure to welcome all of you to this Western Focus Seminar, which is an important part this year of our Annual Conference of the Canadian Nuclear Society.

When I look at the program for this seminar, I can see that we are going to have an exciting few days. We have papers on a wide variety of nuclear reactors, both large and small, and encompassing all kinds of different technologies, from our own Canadian CANDU, our French colleagues' Pressurized Water Reactor design, to modular helium reactors and small fast reactors, and just about everything in between.

And we have lots of papers talking about how these reactors can be used to fulfill the needs of people in Western Canada for energy, with of course a lot of attention to applications for extracting the vast amounts of oil that you guys are lucky enough to have in your tar sands, as well as for electricity production in our western provinces. We also have lots of interesting stuff about health effects and community involvement – it's great to see people from your communities here to hear what's going on and to tell us about their perspectives on bringing nuclear technologies to their back yards.

As you may know, my own experience is in the regulatory side of the nuclear industry, so when I look at all the different types of reactors being discussed in these sessions, my first reaction is to wonder how on earth the Canadian regulator, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, would deal with the challenges of licensing new concepts that are so different from what we are used to dealing with in this country. Obviously we would make use of the valuable work that has been done by international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency in developing standards applicable to a broad spectrum of designs, but of course there are formidable challenges in adapting such international standards to fit into national regulatory regimes. And I'm very happy to see that my friend Terry Jamieson from the CNSC is going to present a paper on Technology Neutral Licensing Requirements to explain how all these licensing challenges are going to be overcome.

I'm really pleased that we decided to bring our Annual Conference to the west this year and that Duane and Len and their colleagues have worked so hard on this Western Focus Seminar. I believe that it will give people out here who are less familiar with nuclear technology an opportunity to learn about the nuclear industry, its strengths, challenges, and problems – yes there are problems – and what nuclear energy can potentially do to fulfill the needs of people and industry in the western provinces. And it will give people with nuclear expertise an opportunity to dispel some of the myths about nuclear energy – yes there are myths, misconceptions and misinformation – so that people will be in a better position to make informed decisions about this technology.

Of course, nuclear technology is not new to western Canada. Indeed the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission has an office right here in Calgary dealing with the myriad of its licensees who use nuclear substances and devices in their work. And lots of people in Western Canada, even those in provinces strongly opposed to nuclear energy, benefit from medical diagnoses and treatments using radioisotopes produced in nuclear reactors. It's a pity that most people only become aware of these important benefits of nuclear energy to our society when they are interrupted, as is the case today with the shutdown of the NRU reactor at Chalk River.

But Western Canada has until now not experienced the benefits of the essentially emission-free electrical power that we get from our nuclear reactors – and hopefully these sessions will help to spread information about this important technology.

But perhaps more importantly, these sessions will give people in the nuclear industry, in Canada and around the world, an opportunity to learn about and to understand better the needs of the western provinces, your technologies, your constraints, and your concerns, so that they can be better equipped to develop nuclear systems that are appropriate to western needs. And it gives nuclear people an opportunity to educate themselves about the specific interests and concerns of people in western communities about nuclear development.

So what role can the Canadian Nuclear Society play in all this? We are not a lobbying organization, although certainly our members are generally people who believe that the use of nuclear energy is a good thing for our society and for our environment. One of the important objectives of the Society is to act as a forum for the exchange of information relating to nuclear science and technology, and our members have been working hard to help disseminate accurate and factual information about nuclear technology in this province. And, if we are asked, we are prepared to do more to help inform open-minded people in your communities about nuclear technologies and their risks and benefits.

When I look at the program for this Western Seminar I am confident that it will make an important contribution to the exchange of information, and that we will all become better informed about the nuclear industry and about the energy needs of the western provinces.

I wish you all a successful and enjoyable seminar.