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Recent restrictions on NORM information from industry –back to 1980's?

The paper provides an overview of the recent trend that seems to be emerging in different industries dealing with NORM, namely restricting the information on radioactivity in industry products and, sometimes, omitting the issue all together.

When the issue of the presence of NORM in many industries has emerged in late 1980's –early 1990's, many mining and mineral processing companies adopted an attitude of “we must resist with all the strength that we can muster any mentioning of radioactivity in our products and residues.”

After some openness and willingness to share the data (which was the case when several IAEA Safety Reports were prepared for different industry sections), mining and mineral processing industry appears to be degrading back to 1980's. Many companies share data only with the regulators and, relatively often, only after a certain legislative pressure has been applied to a company and on a condition that a report or any other document is provided for the internal exclusive use of the regulator.

An illustration of this trend is provided by the analysis of over 350 of Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for the materials that may or do contain NORM, undertaken in the course of work for the IAEA Coordinated Research Project on Improved Assessment of Initial Alarms from Radiation Detection Instruments, where over 27% of these documents were found to be inadequate. The SDS documents for the relevant materials that contained abundant information on NORM concentrations and relevant radiation exposures in the past are currently being replaced with the ones that either try to minimize the available information, or do not mention NORM at all.

This trend is considered inexplicable, especially taking into account the use of radiation control equipment at many ports and border crossings, where elevated readings and/or gamma spectrometry data obtained by these monitors can be easily clarified by simply referring to the paperwork that is accompanying every shipment – the SDS.

The possible reasons for the this trend are described and it is concluded that industry needs to be encouraged to share the relevant data, the possible methods for this process are also suggested.

Author: Mr TSURIKOV, Nick (Calytrix Consulting Pty Ltd)

Presenter: Mr TSURIKOV, Nick (Calytrix Consulting Pty Ltd)

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