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SAFETY

Safely Managing Nuclear Remediation Projects 09/17/2008

By Jeff Bowers

For the better part of thirty years I have been involved in a variety of nuclear related projects. This is what I know: For the most part if you give the craft accurate drawings, the tools they need to perform their work and clear direction they will perform for you every time. If your staff has a well defined scope, open communication and management support they will perform as well. If you are doing all of these things and still find project success allusive what is missing most likely is management credibility regarding safety.



BOWERS

It's crunch time as the final days before proposal submittal draw near. A concentrated effort to focus attention on the RFP, amendments, drawings and specifications demands intense focus. Having performed these tasks a hundred times the staff hones in on the fine tuning of each line item, reevaluating identified risk, stakeholder issues, lessons learned, subcontractor cost, the all important margin and contingency.

Accounting for the time, material, and equipment to support a safe radiological project usually results in a significant effort; one in which input from a variety of project staff are intensely involved with. After award the task of managing a project safely is placed squarely on the shoulders of project managers.



Jeff Bowers

Department of Energy's Miamisburg Mound site located near Dayton Ohio. Demolition after decontamination of a radiologically contaminated facility.

Safety has always been the absolute top priority during bid preparation and attention to each task being estimated is an intensive effort. What I mean is the cost of safety equipment; the time devoted to safety reviews, meetings, and briefings is expensive. The responsibility of the project manager is the time honored art of balancing safety and production and relaying that approach to the field staff; and being believable. I've learned to favor safety every time; this approach has served me well for decades.

Once you add the nuclear component to the safety mix; cost estimating is taken to the next level of importance; especially regarding risk. Even with the tightest project budgets a project manager can

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gain respect and credibility by conveying an absolute insistence for safety. Craft in particular can instinctively tell if the radiological aspects and safety elements of a project are understood by their supervision and they respond accordingly. A work-force that feels the commitment of senior management towards safety and radiological adherence is more efficient and productive which almost always results in an on-time under-cost project.

It doesn't matter if the project spans several months or several years and employees 10 or 1,000 employees, safety credibility is the key. Taking appropriate time up front to address the contractually stated scope in regards to working in a radiological environment will be the single most valuable time a project manager can invest.

When your daily project meetings are structured around the safe performance of work and craft and staff believes in your approach only then can credibility be established. Credibility manifested by setting examples has been the key for me.

A single accident of virtually any nature in a radiological environment can be devastating. The client's management review of the incident running concurrent with temporary work-stoppage is resources spent and schedule lost that can rarely be recovered.

Typical nuclear environmental restoration projects can range from \$500K to \$500M. Many sites require everything from initial site characterization through final status surveys. Most of these projects include the initial determination and relocation of existing utilities, alarm systems and vital security hardware. The primary hazards are confined spaces, fall protection, lead & asbestos abatement, toxic and radiological material remediation, complex demolition scope and innovative design and engineering.

Unforeseen and changing site conditions are as much of the project dynamic as the stated scope. Addressing these issues and more importantly relaying their impact to the project workforce is an increasingly imperative project management attribute. Spend time in the field – in the trenches so to speak, listening, guiding and instructing. First-hand involvement and hands-on management will set the best example. Once project personnel see your absolute commitment to safety and in particular, radiological safety, the project will start off in the right direction.

So from this PM's perspective being credible and setting examples from the onset is vital to leading a successful safe project. After that - instituting a credible management approach to radiological safety is an absolute key. Never underestimate the power of credibility in respect to achieving project objectives.

Jeff Bowers is senior project manager, Safety and Ecology Corp., Cincinnati, Ohio. He can be reached at jbowers@sec-tn.com or 865-216-1657.

If you have an idea for a column, please contact Viewpoint editor William J. Angelo at william_angelo@mcgraw-hill.com or 781-937-9265.

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