Project BY3.01/16 – Component B.1
(PROJECT BE/RA/09)

Belarusian activity experience in public awareness in the post-Chernobyl period

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Workshop
Minsk
8-9 February 2022

Stages of public awareness activity

1986–1990	“Emergency information”, predominance of negative and misleading information
1991–2000	Information using scarce resources, one time actions
2001–2010	Development of conceptual papers, transition to systematic information
2011–2016	Development of methodology, implementation of various ways of working, acquirement of practical experience
2017– present time	Scheduled activity on the basis of gained experience

The state’s attention in the first 10–15 years after the Chernobyl catastrophe was focused on the priority problems:

- Relocation of people from dangerous places to live,
- Establishment of systems for radiation control, health and social security,
- Development and implementation of counter measures in agriculture and forestry.

This stage didn’t imply information work as one of priorities.

Stages of public awareness activity

In the beginning of 2000s the transition to systematic informing of public and experts on the Chernobyl subject was made.

In the most contaminated districts there were created permanent exhibitions **“The district’s overcoming of the consequences after the Chernobyl catastrophe”.**

In 2003 **“The Concept for informing of population and State administrative bodies on the topic of the Chernobyl catastrophe problems”** was adopted.

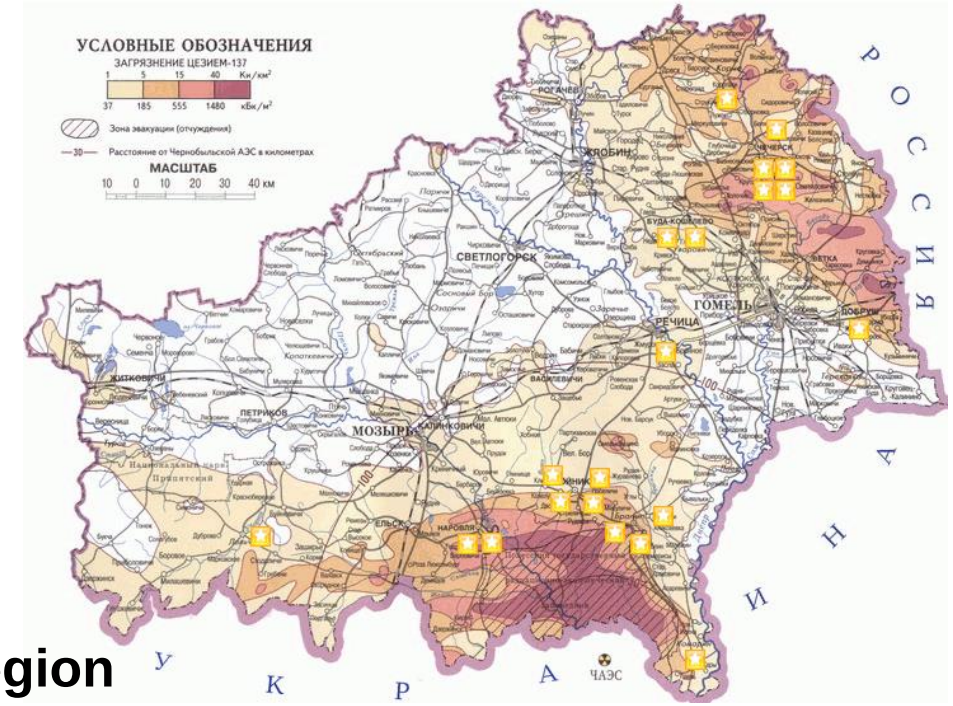
This concept is aimed at establishment of the information system based on the coordinated interaction of state administrative bodies, local executive and regular bodies, on the using of existing structures in education, healthcare, and the media for the dissemination of information.

In 2005 **“The Strategy for information work on the basis of modern computer technologies”** was developed.

Stages of public awareness activity

In the districts there were established information and methodical cabinets **“Radiation security and the principles of personal and social safety”**, which are equipped with radiometers and dosimeters, multimedia facilities, methodological and information materials.

Information centers situated in organisations of education and culture on the contaminated territories (schools, colleges, centers of children art, etc.)



Gomel region

Stages of public awareness activity

In 2011 **“The Complex system of information provision in the sphere of consequence overcoming after the catastrophe at Chernobyl NPP”** was adopted.

Significant contribution to the development of information work was made by the **Program for cooperation on the question of consequence overcoming after the Chernobyl catastrophe within Union State (2013–2016 period).**

A number of new interactive educational projects (remote online-consultation for population on the base of information web-portal, web-actions for pupils, intellectual competitions and brain-rings on radiation security among young people).

Peculiarities of the present after-Chernobyl stage

- A course for revival and development of the affected areas
- Large-scale actions of the state
- Significant financial contributions
- Recognition of the exclusivity of the Belarusian experience at the international level
- 35 years passed after the catastrophe (half-life period of cesium-137 and strontium-90)
- Improvement of radiation situation
- Decline in exposure dose on population
- Production of normatively clean products of agricultural activity
- Catastrophic health consequences (except thyroid cancer) were not detected

- Existence of Chernobyl myths and stereotypes, rooted mindset “we are victims”
- About 1 millions of people living in 2 thousand localities at the radiation contaminated territory
- There are territories where the population was resettled (13 districts, total area 4.37 ths/km^2)
- Significant part of the forest food products doesn’t comply with permissible levels of radionuclides even with a small density of radioactive contamination of the soil (1–5 Ci/km^2)
- Existence of long-term risks, and the ability to manage them
- A new generation has grown up

Basic tasks of information work

- Formation of practical radio-ecological culture, of life safety skills at the contaminated with radionuclides territories, adequate perception of the risk from radiation exposure (radiation risks),
- Reduction of social and psychological tension,
- Debunking of misleading myths and stereotypes,
- Formation of adequate attitude to the affected areas among the population of uncontaminated areas,
- Development of social activity among the residents of the affected areas (among young people in the first place) ensuring their involvement in the process of local recovery and rehabilitation.

Targeted groups for information work

- Population living at the radioactive contaminated territories, with the focus on localities, where the average annual effective dose of exposure may exceed 1 mSv;
- Population living nearby resettled territories;
- High-risk groups who often ignore restrictions in consumption of food products (hunters, residents of localities close to forests);
- Residents of localities, which are transferred to the zones with lower level of contamination due to periodical revision of legislation;
- Resettled population;
- Population living at “clear” territories.

Conclusion

- In order to form adequate perception of the public to the consequences of radiation accident there is a need in systematic and long-term actions, based on the objective, precise and understandable information about consequences and state's activity aimed at their overcoming. This type of information should contain not only description of the health risks, but also recommendations on principles of safe living.
- One of the most efficient approaches is to inform through the network of information local structures located at the contaminated territories.
- It is desirable to use two-level model of communication under which information is carried out through the local trained experts from the educational, healthcare and cultural establishments: the first stage implies information work with the local experts, on the second stage these local experts carry out information work with the residents.

Conclusion

- There is a need in targeted information work, taking into account:
  - The awareness level of different targeted groups,
  - Social aspects of rural and town residents,
  - Balance of positive and negative information,
  - Peculiarities of the specific district (the level of radiation contamination, presence of resettled territories, et al.),
  - The priority in work should be aimed at youth organizations, who quicker perceive information and through which it is more efficient to deliver information to the rest of population.
- An integral part of the information system is a feedback with population i.e. carrying out sociological research, periodic monitoring of awareness level and of psycho-social state.
- Over time the declining interest of population to the radiation security is observed, requiring constant search for new forms and methods of information work.

THANK YOU

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