Citizen Advisory Panels and the Clean Up of the US Nuclear Weapons Complex: Democratic Participation or Public Relations Coup?

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Abstract

During the early 1990s the US Department of Energy radically altered its relationship to citizens by establishing a variety of public participation programs, including Citizen Advisory Boards at 12 of its nuclear weapons production sites. This move to incorporate citizens in its decision making process was a complete reversal of the previous four decades of operation, transforming the previous policy of refusing to share any information with the public into one apparently committed to democratic participation. This paper will sketch the conditions that led to the establishment of the advisory boards, describe the structure of the boards, and examine how successful the program has been, focusing on boards at Fernald, Oak Ridge, and Rocky Flats sites.