



American Academy of Health Physics
American Board of Health Physics

Corner

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Update: Professional Standards and Ethics Committee

John J. Kelly, CHP
Chair

During 1995 Committee members, with significant help from Joyce Davis (both a CHP and an attorney) and Bob Casey, prepared a draft revision of the "Standards of Professional Responsibility for Certified Health Physicists." In addition, guidelines for evaluating complaints alleging violations of these Standards were developed.

The draft Standards and guidelines were presented at a special session of the AAHP in Boston and were published in the October edition of the *CHP News*. The Committee appreciates those of you who took time to comment on the documents. A ballot of the AAHP members on the Standards is scheduled for Spring 1995.

CHPs: The Call to Public Education

Carol D. Berger, CHP
Past President, AAHP

The proposed "Standards of Professional Responsibility for Certified Health Physicists" includes one of the more important but often downplayed responsibilities of the CHP:

"The CHP shall endeavor to advance the Health Physics profession by sharing information and experience with others and by contributing to the work of professional associations, schools, and the professional, scientific, and technical press."

Why is this particular requirement so important? Increasingly issues regarding radiation and radioactivity are being decided in a courtroom. Ignorance frequently plays a large role in these cases, and many claims of radiation injury have little technical merit. Too often judgements are driven by a predisposition to accept

assertions of damage in the absence of a definitive answer from the scientific community. Sadly, the situation is sometimes aggravated by professionals who advance their own opinions as scientific fact.

As CHPs, we cannot change the litigious environment in which we work. We also cannot change the statistical nature of the effect of radiation on living systems and the inherent uncertainty in this effect. We can, however, strive to increase the level of understanding on radiation-related issues throughout our communities and ensure that information provided by us, as CHPs, reflects the current understanding of the science of radiation protection.

The AAHP can and should monitor the information provided by our members and others in a public forum. We should correct misinformation and remind our members of their professional responsibility when we feel that they have been the source of misinformation. In extreme cases, we should censure those individuals who abuse their responsibility.

In doing so, the AAHP must be careful not to stifle debate on scientific issues. Disagreement over technical matters is a characteristic of a robust science, and the public should not be shielded from this debate. However, the public deserves to know what is accepted fact and what is merely opinion or hypothesis.

As reflected in the Standards, there is no longer an option—the CHP must attempt to advance the profession by sharing what is known about radiation and radioactivity. It is our job to know these facts. We are paid to use our professional skills to ensure that all people for whom we are directly responsible are afforded radiologically safe workplaces and homes. But we can't stop there. If we don't also pursue public and press encounters, jump at the chance to provide training and education, and willingly agree to interface with federal, state, and local officials on technical issues, we will continue to find ourselves trying to recover from potentially unsafe radiological conditions that were created in the name of safety, but based in ignorance.

Each of the Standards of Professional Responsibility for CHPs is important. However, the sharing of information and experience deserves a special commitment.

Reminder: McAdams Award

Nominations for the AAHP/ABHP Wm. B. McAdams Outstanding Service Award are due 1 March to:

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Benton City, WA 99320
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