

On the balance between normal industrial safety and the demands of radiation safety regulations

An unsolicited email (Dec 2012) from Ken Chaplin, a senior long-time inspector in the nuclear industry¹:

“First, concerns for radiation protection outweigh concerns for industrial safety. One example, four of us were working in a relatively high temperature environment in lead jackets and plastic lined suits. The radiological hazards were insignificant, but two of us almost passed out from the heat in a very difficult to access location. Then, I had staff climbing ladders attached to walls, with very little space to get their feet on the ladder rungs. They were required to wear steel toed shoes, inside rubber "one size fits all" boots, inside paper booties. The extra layers were in the name of contamination control; however, I am far more concerned about people falling 8 metres onto piping.

Second, staff are increasingly worried about low levels of contamination in spite of ever increasing efforts to eliminate contamination. In my opinion, this results in much lower productivity and higher stress levels caused, and experienced, by the entire organization pursuing ALARA, without accompanying health benefits.

I am watching as radiological protection dogma, in particular ALARA, stops the nuclear industry dead in its tracks. It is hard to prevent this, but I am trying.”

ALARA safety restrictions, intended to allay fears, achieve the opposite. Regulation and worker stress drive up costs, bring no benefit and are economically damaging.

¹ Ken Chaplin has agreed that his submission and name may be used