

Historic Overview: SRA Chicago Regional Chapter

(by Margaret MacDonell, President)

(The first part of this overview was written to address a request from national SRA for input to a historic perspective of the beginnings and happenings of each Chapter, so it matches the more folksy style of the SRA historian who cheerfully volunteered to compile those vignettes.)

The story of the Chicago Regional Chapter of SRA begins in December 1994. At one of the usual lively dinners during the Society's annual meeting, I asked Vlasta Molak if she knew whether anyone from the Chicago area had established a chapter yet, as several of us – including Peter Tong and Sean Dundon from companies in the heart of the Windy City – would like to heat ourselves up over risk issues at a local level so we could keep warm during our notorious winters and beyond. At the same time, others at Argonne National Laboratory (ANL) including Loren Habegger and Tom Wolsko suggested that a critical mass was in place (reflecting their nuclear engineering minds?) to organize a local chapter.

About 20 risk-ophiles attended early planning meetings at Argonne and elected Tom Wolsko interim president and Loren Habegger interim secretary-treasurer in January 1995. Following the Dilbert principle of establishing committees to achieve the appearance of respectable organizational complexity, three were formed to begin scoping activities for the Chapter: (1) membership committee (Heidi Hartmann, Fred Kirchner, and Jerry Gillette of ANL); (2) publicity committee (Sean Dundon of IT Corporation, Fred Kirchner, and me); and (3) program committee (Joe Gadomski of Black & Veatch, Peter Tong of Woodward-Clyde, and Tom Wolsko).

The group's aim was to provide a means for furthering the Society's mission at the local level. Our desire was to facilitate interactions on risk issues among government, industry, academic, and other research and community-based organizations and individuals. Our hoped-for radius of involvement extended from Illinois (including down-state Springfield) and southern Wisconsin to northern Indiana and possibly just-over-the-border Michiganders.

Moniker options ranged from the standard *Chicago Chapter* (dismissed as too limiting) and *Midwest Chapter* (too broad) to *Da Chapter* – as those were the days of Mike Ditka's Bears, whose flavor was captured in ongoing Saturday Night Live spoofs. Searching like Goldilocks for just the right feel to capture the "greater area team," the group settled on the *Chicago Regional Chapter*.

Participants in the early planning meetings also defined the Chapter's objectives:

- Serve as the focal point for interaction of the members of the Chapter and other individuals and organizations in the Chicago region interested in risk analysis.
- Promote the scientific practice of risk analysis and to encourage research and development of new risk analysis tools and methods as related to problems in the Midwest.
- Conduct scientific and educational meetings that will encourage beneficial interaction among members of all disciplines and professions involved in the field of risk analysis.
- Act as a resource to educate the community on current issues in risk analysis.
- Act as a resource for the National SRA.

In addition, these pioneers approved the Chapter's charter, which was sent to the national organization to formalize our existence. We received their blessing in March 1995.

With the Chapter now official, the membership committee pored through the rolls of SRA and other groups and sent out emails to tap the interest thermometers of the locals. More than 30 curious new members turned out for additional organizational meetings during that first year and identified ecological and health risk and facility safety analyses as key interest areas.

Another summer hiatus led into the next annual meeting of the Society, after which the fledgling Chapter rolled up its sleeves to plan its technical program in earnest. The program committee lined up several speakers, and the publicity committee prepared its first newsletter – which described the Chicago Regional Chapter, announced the February meeting that would kick off the speaker series, and took a first shot at its “focal resource” role by identifying recent risk-related publications, software, and Internet sites. Subsequent newsletters updated those highlights.

Beginning with that February 1996 event, technical risk presentations have been conducted jointly with Chapter business through quarterly to biannual meetings until a recent temporary hiatus. Sean Dundon was elected the second president, with me as secretary-treasurer and Fred Kirchner as president-elect. Sean subsequently moved to the east coast, followed later by Fred. Jim Butler assumed responsibility as webmaster for the national SRA and also serves in this role for the Chicago Regional Chapter.

Most Chapter meetings have been held at Argonne National Laboratory about 20 miles west of Chicago. Although additional venues have been pursued, sufficient space at other candidate locations has been a constraint as attendance has ranged from 15-50 and higher, notably for presentations by then-SRA president Yacov Haimes and others whose topics hit broad interest buttons.

Past meetings were often in the evening, although some have been daytime seminars and colloquia. Chapter members typically comprise half the attendees, which include individuals from the private sector (ranging from small businesses to large environmental companies and law firms), state and Federal organizations (Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy), and Argonne National Laboratory, as well as environmental studies students from Northwestern University.

Into 2000, speakers and topics included:

- Russ Brown (Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, retired; Idaho Falls, ID) – bomb fallout and thyroid cancer: statistical sheep in real wolves’ clothing.
- Don Coursey (University of Chicago; Chicago, IL) – monetary evaluation of environmental resources.
- Vincent Covello (Center for Risk Communication; New York, NY) – risk communication: recent advances in research and applications.
- Yacov Haimes (Center for Risk Management of Engineering Systems, University of Virginia; Charlottesville, VA) – risk of extreme and catastrophic events.
- Ihor Hlohowskyj (ANL; Argonne, IL) – ecological risk assessments on hazardous waste sites: issues, problems, and applications.
- Lester Lave (Carnegie Mellon University; Pittsburgh, PA) – environmental life cycle analysis.

- Elsie Millano (ERM-North Central, Inc.; Vernon Hills, IL) – application of the Illinois Tiered Approach to Corrective Action Objectives (TACO).
- Gilbert Omenn (Presidential/Congressional Commission on Risk Assessment and Risk Management) – national cross-agency risk report.
- Amy Pelka (U.S. EPA Region 5; Chicago, IL) – sediment bioaccumulation modeling and application in the Great Lakes.
- Rebecca Raftery (Jenner and Block; Chicago, IL) – risk-based corrective action: Illinois' new approach to brownfields.
- William Rish (Woodward Clyde Consultants; Solon, OH) – probabilistic cost-benefit analysis for environmental decisions.
- Shawn Sager and Andrew Middleton (American Society for Testing and Materials) – practical pointers for succeeding with risk-based corrective action.
- Peter Tong (Woodward-Clyde Consultants; Chicago, IL) – practical framework for environmental risk management.

Since late 2000, speakers and topics have included:

- Kristina Voigt (GSF National Research Center for Environment and Health Institute for Biomathematics and Biometry; Neuherberg, Germany) – environmental informatics and Internet resources for environmental chemicals.
- Almut Heinrich (ecomed publishers; Landsberg, Germany) – role of scientific publications in environmental communication.
- Otto Hutzinger (University of Bayreuth; Bayreuth, Germany) – evolution of interdisciplinary environmental risk analysis, integrating environmental chemistry, exposure, and toxicity/risk analyses.
- Alvin Young (U.S. Department of Energy [DOE] Center for Risk Excellence; Argonne, IL) – risk in the DOE cleanup program.
- Mike Miller (Environmental Research Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, IL) – environmental restoration (lipstick on a corpse?), and terrestrial carbon sequestration (within the global climate change program)
- Ivan Holoubek (Masaryk University; Brno, Czech Republic) – identifying ecological risks in the Czech Republic, and an expert system approach for assessing risks.
- Igor Linkov (Arthur D. Little; Cambridge, MA) – spatially explicit ecological risk assessments: case studies.
- Ken Morgan and Leo Newland (Texas Christian University) – remote sensing and geographic information system (GIS) methods for evaluating nonpoint source pollutants.

- Jeff Gaffney (Environmental Research Division, Argonne National Laboratory; Argonne, IL) – megacities and regional air pollutant transport: Mexico City case study.
- Tom Brody (EPA Region 5; Chicago, IL) – a risk communication distance learning tool.
- K.C. Chun (Environmental Assessment Division, Argonne National Laboratory; Argonne, IL) – pollutant releases from oil and gas exploration: air quality impact analysis using the CALPUFF model.
- Peter Tong (URS Corporation; Chicago, IL) – EMS: greening the government through environmental management systems
- Robert Van Lonkhuyzen (Environmental Assessment Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, IL) – wetlands assessment and management.

After an extended quiet spell, Chapter efforts were renewed in 2003 and several speakers were contacted to discuss possible schedule options, with topics ranging from dirty bombs to chemical mixtures and cumulative risk. Tentative arrangements were made for an initial speaker to discuss spatial analysis and ecological/ cumulative risk assessment (see May presentation below). In the meantime, E.J. Dell and Lara Pullen of Environmental Health Consulting in Chicago were also pursuing the reinvigoration of Chapter activities. In April 2004, E.J. Dell held a meeting at EPA Region 5, organized in coordination with Heidi Hartmann, to discuss speaker, venue, and schedule options as well as membership and organizational issues; new officers will be elected soon. In May 2004, the following speaker presented at a meeting held at Argonne:

- Charlie Menzie (Menzie-Cura and Associates, Winchester, MA) – a spatial exposure model: assessing cumulative risks to habitats and ecological receptors, and the link to human health.

A survey is being distributed to current and prospective Chapter members (including members of the national society who live in this Midwest region) to identify areas of topical interest for the next series of speakers. Subsequent Chapter meetings are expected to be held in Chicago, with the first tentatively planned for the end of June and a second to be held in later in the summer.