

Old INEC exists but only on paper, with no funding

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

Yes, there is an Idaho Nuclear Energy Commission which was based in Idaho Falls nine years but it now exists on paper only.

Its current replacement is the Bureau of Energy Resources headed by Phil Welker, buried as part of the Idaho Department of Water Resources of which A. Kenneth Dunn is the director.

The law creating the Idaho Nuclear Energy Commission is still on the books but the commission gasped its last breath June 30, 1976, after the Idaho Legislature failed to fund it.

The only director the INEC ever had, Gene P. Rutledge, left in 1976 for Anchorage, Alaska. When heard from last year he was still there engaged in consulting work.

The INEC, in fact, was the only independent state agency ever to be based in Idaho Falls.

The five-member advisory board which included Donald J. MacKay, Idaho Falls bank executive, as the chairman, also automatically expired with the INEC.

The INEC struggled in its final years because of skimpy funding. After its demise in 1976 most of its duties were transferred to the old Office of Energy which also had a failing funding record.

The Office of Energy functioned in a sporadic fashion at several locations in Boise but finally by gubernatorial executive order, in November 1981, was transferred to the IDWR and became the Bureau of Energy Resources. It has become a viable unit of state government since, but it's a far cry from the old INEC which was concerned mainly with promoting the nuclear industry in Idaho.

The INEC became a political football in the 1976 Idaho Legislature when some moderate senators combined to defeat its funding.

Then Gov. Cecil D. Andrus did nothing to thwart the movement. He later said he would have the INEC's functions transferred to the Office of Energy directly under his office.

He also did not ask for funding to revive the agency.

The INEC offices were located on Second Street, just east of Holmes Avenue. They are now occupied by U.S. Navy administrative units which function in connection with the naval nuclear reactor program at INEL.

Id. Aug 3, 1983



Gene P. Rutledge

Andrus at that time issued an executive order "to review current energy and conservation activities and to take whatever steps were necessary consistent with Idaho law to bring them into line with the philosophy and goals reflected in the order."

Gov. John V. Evans tried a couple years ago to convince the Idaho Legislature to make the Office of Energy a full state agency, just as his predecessor, Andrus, had done.

The Republican majority in the Legislature voted the agency down, mainly on grounds the Office of Energy was too concerned with conservation and not enough with development of new sources of energy.

The Office of Energy functioned primarily with federal funding and very little state money until the 1981 executive order made further funding unnecessary.

The Office of Energy was created by the governor's executive order in 1974 and functioned as such until it was meshed with IDWR.

Directors through the years included Kirk Hall, Chris Smith, Bob Lenaghan and Ken Green. Green left in March, 1982, for California and was replaced by Welker.

There is virtually no chance the INEC will ever be funded again or revived, the governor and leading legislators agreed. If such were to happen, it likely would be based in Boise rather than Idaho Falls.

The Bureau of Energy Resources is now located in the state Towers Building in Boise as part of IDWR and has a staff of 22.

It is primarily engaged in administering the Idaho Water Plan and other energy and conservation matters.

Angie Neitzel, the bureau's chief public information officer, said the bureau is mainly federally funded and has five major goals.

These include energy extension service to provide energy information and including workshop for small consumers; state energy conservation programs which are addressed to the use of energy for commercial, industrial, agricultural and residential interests; coordination with the Bonneville Power Administration for local government programs and helping to further the regional energy plan; administering the BPA bioenergy program to assist Idaho businesses in developing cogeneration and involving the use of wood waste; and institutional building program involving schools and hospital.

The bureau is also involved with the state energy programs in administration and overseeing any oil overcharges. For example, Chevron paid more than \$300,000 in overcharges and this was diverted to the conservation fund.

"Energy and water issues continue to be of concern to Idahoans," said Mrs. Neitzel.

She said the bureau has 2,100 subscribers to its newsletter, Energy Update, who have indicated the need and interest for more articles of a technical nature and better coverage of Idaho specific energy programs.