Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Demetrios L. Basdekas - (Barus Awardee 1991)

Author(s)

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Description

A biography of Demetrios Basdekas, an electrical engineer who received the Barus Award in 1991.

Body

Demetrios Basdekas is a highly regarded electrical engineer who has been with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) (and its predecessor the Atomic Energy Commission) since 1972, after having worked for about a decade in the nuclear power field in various capacities. He gradually realized that the organization was putting more emphasis on promoting the industry than on ensuring that it followed safe practices. Matters came to a head in 1976 when, he was subjected to internal pressure to approve the design of the Clinch River breeder reactor despite his strong concerns about the adequacy of the proposed control system. Following his refusal to bow to the pressure, Basdekas was transferred to other work and replaced by an inexperienced staff member who would be likely to do as he was told.

Unable to get an adequate hearing within the NRC, Basdekas went to members of the United States Senate with committee jurisdiction in this field. He succeeded in persuading four of his colleagues (including Marinos) to join with him. This may explain why he was able to hold on to his job. The issue was aired publicly and the Clinch River Reactor project was ultimately cancelled.

Basdekas continued to speak out publicly on various safety related issues involving nuclear power plants through the mid 80s. Since then he has confined himself to a more conventional approach to his work within the NRC. In 1991 he received the IEEE SSIT Award for Outstanding Service in the Public Interest in recognition of his longstanding efforts to improve the regulatory process in the nuclear power field in the face of powerful opposition.

Notes

This account of his story is excerpted from the book *Controlling Technology: Ethics and the Responsible Engineer*, by Stephen Unger.

Excerpt from:

- **Unger, Stephen. Controlling Technology: Ethics and the Responsible Engineer. 2nd Ed., Wiley, 1994. Chapter 2 Section 11.**

Contributor(s)

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Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

Award Winners

Topics

Public Health and Safety
Employer/Employee Relationships
Public Well-being

Discipline(s)

Electrical Engineering