

1. BACKGROUND

In August 1998, SALROM (Bucharest, Rumania, SMRI member) asked for help from the SMRI and the SMRI European Coordinator (Hans Haddenhorst) made a site visit. At its October 1998 meeting SMRI urged SALROM to move the people living on top of the cavern.

In April 1999, SALROM asked SMRI to send a delegation to Romania to meet with various government officials to explain the seriousness of the situation. In May 1999 an SMRI delegation (Hans Haddenhorst, Gerard Durup and Bill Diamond) spent three days in Romania. They met with the Prefect of Valcea (like the governor of state in the US) and two very senior officials of the federal government in Bucharest. They were assured that both the people on top of the cavern and those downstream would be moved. They were also told that a contract would be given to a consortium of SOCON, DEEP and RESPEC to study alternatives.

In the summer of 1999 SALROM specified the alternatives that were to be considered, specifically saying not to look at a dam. Further, the consortium would have to be financially responsible for whatever happened, an impossible request because working underground, there is no way to say with any certainty what will happen, and the consortium would not have responsibility for implementation. At the SMRI Fall 1999 meeting, SALROM presented a preliminary plan to backfill the cavern. The SMRI membership expressed a number of concerns and urged that other alternatives be considered **AND THE PEOPLE BE MOVED**. SALROM promised (as usual) that the people would be moved, and went ahead with detailing the plan to backfill.

The Spring 2000 meeting was at Salt 2000 (The Hague). SALROM did not attend and there was not much discussion.

At the Fall 2000 meeting, SALROM again reported on their plan to backfill. However, SMRI was not willing to comment from a technical standpoint on what should be done : its bylaws do not allow SMRI itself to provide technical advice. SMRI again urged SALROM to have a peer review and look at alternatives. SMRI offered to hire companies at SMRI's expense to conduct the peer review. There were a number of delays, but finally in February of 2001 Gerard Durup as SMRI European Coordinator went to Bucharest and concluded there was enough information to review the backfilling plan. There needed a translation and this continued to drag until mid-April when the Romanian government advised that they had earmarked funds in the 2002 budget for backfilling, but wanted an independent review of the backfilling plan and two other plans that we had never heard of. The second plan was to study more, and the third was to pump the brine out slowly, letting the cavern roof slowly settle. If the roof was flexible that might have worked, but rock is brittle and after just a little brine was removed the roof would have fractured and collapsed.

SALROM asked for the reviews by mid-summer so they could qualify for the funding. SMRI hired three reviewers, each of whom independently evaluated the three proposals.

SMRI cannot and has not provided technical assistance. However, the members of SMRI do have expertise in solution mining and cavity management. Throughout all of this, SMRI has urged that (1) all people living on top of the cavern and those "downstream" of it be immediately moved out of harm's way. (2) no one stays on top of the cavern. (3) an early warning system be installed. (4) SALROM have a peer review of their plans (5) SALROM look at all the alternatives.

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