



May 22, 2019

John F. Ahearne, June 14, 1934 – March 12, 2019 In Memoriam



John Francis Ahearne, 84, born June 14, 1934, died peacefully in his sleep March 12, 2019.

Born and raised in New Britain, Connecticut. He obtained a BS in Engineering Physics and MS in Physics from Cornell University, and later a MA and PhD in physics from Princeton University. He served in the U.S. Air Force for 11 y. He continued his service to this country by working as a federal employee starting with the U.S. Department of Defense, then to the U.S. Department of Energy at its formation. From there he became a Commissioner for the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, where he served as Chairman for two years. He finished his federal career with the Government Accountability Office.

Dr. Ahearne served as a member of NCRP from 1999 to 2011 and was elected Distinguished Emeritus Member in 2011. He served as Chairman of SC 1-19 on Health Protection Issues Associated with Use of Active Detection Technology Security Systems for Detection of Radioactive Threat Materials; was a member of Program Area Committee 7 on Radiation Education, Risk Communication, and Outreach; and served on the Nominating Committee from 2003 to 2009. John also was a speaker at both the 2005 and 2009 annual meetings and a member of the Advisory Panel on Public Policy.

Dr. Ahearne, quoting from a virtual article published by the [Society for Risk Analysis](#), “wrote about the need for scientists to be honest, objective and persistent. In his later positions with the Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society (Executive Director, 1989 to 1997, then Executive Director Emeritus and Director of the Ethics Program 1997 to 2009), he called for increased interaction between scientists and community stakeholders. He was widely recognized for encouraging independent, objective analysis of contentious issues. His even-handedness led to his being chosen to chair a number of important committees for the National Research Council. His service as an expert reviewer of the work by others in his field was famous for its penetrating, impartial insights. He was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1996 in recognition of these contributions.”

After his retirement, he continued to work in policy and science issues first as Vice President at Resources for the Future, and then Executive Director of Sigma Xi. He continued to work with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine and the University of California’s President’s Council Advisory Council for Los Alamos, Livermore and Berkeley laboratories, as well as a board member for the Wisconsin Energy Corporation (now WEC Energy Group).

John is survived by his wife Barbara, who he met during their senior year of high school; five children; and eleven grandchildren.