



# A Comedy of 'Errors'



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# Summer “Fun”

- During the ‘dog days’ of August last summer several of us enjoyed a delightful e-mail exchange via the SG30 website ([sg30@nea.fr](mailto:sg30@nea.fr)) concerning the use of ‘**error**’ to signify ‘**uncertainty**’.
- For your amusement today, here is how it went ... I hope you can follow the ‘thread’!

# Alan Nichols' Initial Comments

- “I would just like to go on record that I am not a big fan when it comes to using the word ‘**error**’ in ... (all) situations involving nuclear databases.”
- I can agree that ‘**errors**’ are committed in data measurements, compilations and evaluations, and should be defined as such in ... debate/publications, but I do not believe this type of label is relevant to the current discussion (SG30). Rather we are now beginning to discuss ‘**uncertainties**’ in particular data and data sets.
- I am sure that the experimentalists would ... welcome our move to ‘**uncertainties**’, for they would never dream of committing any ‘**errors**’.”

# Don Smith's Response (1)

- “I agree with them (Alan Nichols' comments) completely since for years I have been uncomfortable with using ‘error’ to denote ‘uncertainty’. Like you, when I hear the word ‘error’ I think of ‘mistake’, ‘blunder’, whatever ... It is indeed unfortunate that the terms ‘error’ and ‘uncertainty’ have become intermingled in the lexicon of our field.
- How do we get people to stop using ‘error’ as a substitute for ‘mistake’?”

# Don Smith's Response (2)

- “Please note that (in my previous message) I made both an ‘**error**’ and a ‘**mistake**’. What I meant to say was:

**... How do we get people to stop using ‘error’ as a substitute for ‘UNCERTAINTY’? ...**

- Alan (Nichols): Please enjoy a good chuckle about this one (my ‘**blunder**’)!!!”

# Arjan Koning's Response (1)

- “For me it's natural: I would never say: “I wish there would be more ‘errors’ in EXFOR” (knowing that there are plenty of ‘errors’ and ‘uncertainties’ in EXFOR).”

# Arjan Plompen's Response

- “Here's another one:

If we don't handle and conceive of ‘**uncertainties**’ correctly we will never find the ‘**errors**’.”

# Arjan Koning's Response (2)

- “Don,

I don't want to abuse the sg30 list much more for this, but you may want to take this one to the next CSEWG meeting:

“There are more **errors** than **uncertainties** in ENDF/B-VII” (which of course refers to your cleanup of old covariance matrices)

Cheers, Arjan”