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At IAEA, Shea helped to establish the basic IAEA safeguards concepts and developed the methods and techniques for implementing IAEA safeguards at plutonium reprocessing plants and uranium enrichment facilities. He was responsible for safeguards implementation in several nations, including Japan, India and Indonesia.

Shea led development of new IAEA verification systems for nuclear materials released from defense programs in the Russian Federation and the United States, as well as the IAEA technical investigations on a future Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty and verification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. He also served on a United Nations Security Council panel on disarmament in Iraq.

Shea is a Fellow of the Institute of Nuclear Materials Management and founder and past chairman of the organization's Vienna chapter. He earned a master's degree in nuclear engineering and a doctorate in nuclear science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York.