

## Fear of Shipping

Several years ago, just months before the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant opened, I attended the Spectrum '98 conference in Denver. Because of Denver's close proximity to the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site and because Rocky Flats needed to ship its transuranic waste to WIPP to meet its cleanup deadline, WIPP's operation was a prime topic of the conference.

A panel session on WIPP drew a large audience, with both sides of the issue well represented. I remember a discussion of the level of fear that local residents had about shipments to WIPP that might pass through their communities. One panelist recalled a question by a local resident, asking, in effect, if she happened to be standing on the side of the road when a WIPP truck drove by, would she die?

At this point in the discussion, many in the nuclear industry might be tempted to answer: Yeah, but only if she threw herself in front of the truck and were run over. And therein lies the problem. Members of the industry know the level of radiation that she might receive if the WIPP truck drives by (nil, zip, nada, etc.) and think the question frivolous. The average member of the public, however, thinks this is quite a relevant question. And many of those asking are genuinely afraid. Not just obstructive, not just career oppositionists, but ordinary people who are terribly, terribly afraid.

And if New Mexico (or Colorado, or Idaho, or any state) residents are afraid of the WIPP trucks, then they are probably going to be doubly or triply afraid of spent fuel transport. This is an issue that will not go away on its own, but must be faced directly if the industry is to succeed in its desire to see the Yucca Mountain

high-level waste repository open and operate.

It's going to continue to be an issue in part because Nevada is prepared to make sure that it's an issue. What the state could not achieve by lobbying Congress and may not achieve in the courts, it's going to try to achieve in the arena of public opinion. You can be sure that in the next months and years, Nevada, helped by antinuclear activists, will be promulgating all sorts of disinformation about the dangers, the hazards, of nuclear waste transport. Never mind that the nuclear industry thinks of transport as one of its strengths (a strong record of thousands of incident-free shipments). A strong public relations campaign against nuclear waste transport may be able to undo years of good example.

What can the industry do about this? Well, forewarned is forearmed, as the saying goes. The U.S. Department of Energy and the nuclear industry have released all sorts of information on transport safety. The industry has formed the U.S. Transport Council to educate the public, Congress, and the media about transportation safety. Hearings will be held in numerous locations in the next few years as the DOE's transport plan is firmed up. But will this be enough? Sadly, probably not.

The scientists at the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory are working on this, as evidenced by two articles appearing in this issue ("Consent versus Consensus: Stakeholder Involvement in the Identification of Necessary and Sufficient Transportation Safety Requirements," p. 22, and "Two Views of Public Participation," p. 32). One of the messages of these two articles: *Listen*. We need to listen more and



## Talking Less, Listening More

talk less. We need to take public concerns more seriously. We need to take the time to listen to the public, to understand their fears, to respond to them in ways that are meaningful to them, not just to us.

Easy? No one says it is. But important? Extremely. It will most likely be the difference between success and failure as the industry and the government move toward final disposal of HLW and spent fuel.—Nancy J. Zacha, Editor ■