

## Panic in the streets?

A few years ago, when South Carolina joined with Connecticut and New Jersey to form the Atlantic Compact, it became clear that South Carolina's low-level waste disposal facility would soon be closing to out-of-compact waste. In the event, the state chose a phased approach to closedown, allowing out-of-compact waste to be disposed of there until June 30, 2008.

When the announcement was made, I expected a massive reaction from LLW generators around the country. I don't know that I expected panic in the streets exactly, but surely there was going to be *some* reaction. However, the silence was deafening. Where were the hospitals, the universities, the research labs, the utilities? Where were the letters to the editor? The letters to state agencies? The letters to Congress? Was anyone paying attention?

Actually, people noticed. But after 20-odd years of working with states, compacts, various agencies, operators, and activists to set up new LLW disposal facilities, we've all just gotten a little tired. I mean, after two-plus decades, what do we have to show for it? One site got licensed (Ward Valley, in California, for the Southwest Compact), but even that facility fell through—for political reasons (isn't it always the political machinations that bollux things up, just when you think you've gotten the technical issues settled!). Otherwise, more than 20 years of work and lots of money have yielded mostly disillusionment and lawsuits.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of again attending the EPRI Low-Level Waste Conference (thank you, Sean Bushart, for a great conference!). If

you want to know what utility waste managers are thinking, this is the place to be. This year's conference featured a panel session with representatives from the LLW disposal industry (Barnwell, Envirocare, and Waste Control Specialists—WCS) and representatives from the nuclear utilities.

One utility panelist spoke for the whole nuclear industry, I think, when he voiced a few plaintive wishes. All he wants, he said, is for Barnwell to stay open to all LLW generators, for Envirocare to get a Class B/C license, and for WCS to open a facility to provide another disposal alternative.

Isn't wishful thinking wonderful? Reality, however, tells us something else. Barnwell is probably not going to stay open to all generators. Sure, South Carolina is having a budget crisis (just like just about every other state in the nation), but politicians put a lot of faith in precedent, and a previous governor lost an election over the Barnwell site; his experience will stand as a lesson to all who aspire to the position.

For its part, Envirocare has placed its request for a Class B/C license on hold, while Utah fights the battle against Private Fuel Storage over a proposed spent fuel storage facility. Who knows how long *that* battle will last?

Finally, WCS may someday open a facility open to all, but there are a lot of hurdles and a lot of "ifs" to be dealt with before that could come about.

So, what other alternatives are there? Congress? It already thinks it has *solved* the problem. The U.S. Department of Energy? It has its own sites, and doesn't really concern itself with commercial fuel. For the DOE to get involved, it would have to get a



*If Wishes  
Were  
Horses . . .*

directive from Congress . . . and we've already discussed Congress. The President? Well, there's a possibility, I guess. But George W. Bush didn't do much to help the LLW community when he was governor of Texas.

I don't want to sound pessimistic, but maybe panic in the streets isn't such a bad idea after all. At least it would get someone's attention.—  
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