

## No Respect

Let's face it, in the world of nuclear waste, high-level waste has always been the sexy one. High-level waste gets all the budget; high-level waste gets most of the congressional hearing time; high-level waste gets the most consistent regulation. Low-level waste, on the other hand, just "don't get no respect" (with apologies to the late Rodney Dangerfield). In the case of very low-level waste, it's even subjected to incredible discrimination, being regulated based on where it comes from, not how dangerous it might be. (Compare: Suppose your local police department issued traffic tickets based on where you live, not how you are driving.)

These days, however, low-level waste is attracting attention. There's nothing like a looming deadline to make people begin to take notice, and the day when most of the nation will no longer have a disposal option for all three classes of low-level waste (A, B, and C) is fast approaching—just a tad shy of only three years. As I have learned as I've grown older, it seems that a time period like three years can be here almost before you turn around.

Why is this happening? The short version is that South Carolina, which hosts the Barnwell low-level waste disposal facility—the only LLW disposal facility that (a) is available to waste generators in *all* states and (b) takes all three classes of waste—wanted to make sure that the site would have enough room to hold the decommissioning waste when the state's own nuclear power plants begin to be decommissioned. Of course, that decommissioning is many years off, but the state, certainly wisely, decided that it had to

take action to secure the space for its own plants.

Therefore, the state, after spending several years in the Southeast Low-Level Waste Compact, pulled out of that compact because of a growing distrust that any other state would ever agree to site a disposal facility that would operate once Barnwell closed and entered into a compact with two small northern states, New Jersey and Connecticut, and then set a date—July 1, 2008—for when out-of-compact waste can no longer be accepted at Barnwell. Thus, the state has ensured that the site would be part of the compact system, with all the legal protections that implies, and also ensured that the state's nuclear power plants would have a disposal facility for decommissioning waste.

*Except* (big word in this instance), as we learned this year during a session at the Tucson Waste Management conference, once Barnwell is no longer accepting waste from around the nation, there will not be enough business for the site to keep it open all year long (see page 29, this issue). The state is looking at having it opened, say, a few months of the year, or maybe a few months every other year. Because of that, the facility operator has intimated that it may just want to get out of Barnwell completely once it closes to out-of-compact waste, because there will be no financial incentive to continue.

It reminds me of the Vietnam days, when "we had to destroy the village to save the village." Here, we may be destroying the disposal site to save it for South Carolina's decommissioning waste. And that, I think, is the ultimate in disrespect.—*Nancy J. Zacha, Editor* ■



*Low-Level  
Waste  
May Soon  
Bite Us All  
in the Butt*

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