

## A Tale of Two Denvers

As I write this, I have just returned from the 2005 DD&R Topical Meeting in Denver (a meeting report will appear in a future issue). Interestingly, the very first industry conference I attended after I took on the job of editing *Radwaste Solutions* in July 1998 was the September 1998 Spectrum conference, also held in Denver. I recently took the time to read through my meeting report from that conference (see "Eyes on the Numbers," *Radwaste Magazine*, November/December 1998, p. 47), to get a sense of the industry at that time. What a difference!

At the Spectrum conference, the two big topics on people's minds were the U.S. Department of Energy's Rocky Flats cleanup and the timing of the opening of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. The two were related, of course, because until Rocky Flats had someplace to send its transuranic waste, site closure was just a gleam in someone's eye.

According to Gerald Boyd, acting deputy assistant secretary for Science and Technology in the DOE's Environment Management office at the time of the Spectrum conference, the DOE had just embarked on its "accelerated cleanup" program, by which the majority of DOE sites would be cleaned up by 2006. Rocky Flats was in that accelerated cleanup group, but the DOE conservatively predicted that cleanup there could not be completed until 2010. While that was a huge step forward from an earlier estimate of site cleanup completion in 2070, in the end it turned out to be much too conservative.

Today, Rocky Flats cleanup is just

weeks away (weeks!) from completion, more than a year ahead of the "stretch" goal of 2006, and several years ahead of the "realistic" goal of 2010 (see "Making the Impossible Possible: Closing Rocky Flats—Ahead of Schedule and Under Budget," this issue, page 39). Don't you love it when we do something right?

As for WIPP, we all know that WIPP finally opened in March 1999. So, we have some six and a half years of operating experience behind us, and, as notes a familiar hymn to western living, "seldom is heard a discouraging word." There have been one or two minor traffic incidents in the hundreds of shipments since the shipping program began, but the crashes and leaks and other potentially deadly events that so worried the members of the public along the shipping routes never happened. Never even came close to happening. I wonder if any of those concerned members of the public who protested so loudly against the WIPP opening are even aware of the WIPP shipments these days. I tend to think not, but I have to confess that I really don't know. Maybe they remain riveted by every one. But somehow I doubt it. Shipments to WIPP have become part of the fabric of everyday life in that part of the country.

It's hard to believe that it's been seven years since that Spectrum conference. It's hard to believe that I've been editing this magazine that long as well. It's hard to believe that Rocky Flats is now an empty field, soon to be a wildlife refuge. (Wasn't the "most dangerous building in the country" located on that site?) And,



*We've Come  
a Long Way  
in a Few  
Short Years*

some day, but not for a couple of decades or so, it's going to be hard to believe that WIPP's mission is complete and that the facility will be shutting down forever.

Time passes, inexorably, and in the meantime, we are getting the job done.—*Nancy J. Zacha, Editor*