

Fernald: From Weapons to Wetlands

Sometimes being the editor of *Radwaste Solutions* magazine is a tough job. You have to convince people who have many more important things to do to sit down and write an article for your magazine, and you have to do this over and over again. You have to understand that your authors have other jobs to do, and they have schedules of their own that are much more important (to them) than the magazine's schedule.

But sometimes being the editor of *Radwaste Solutions* magazine is pure pleasure. You get to work with a lot of wonderful people—people who are talented, generous with their time, and enthusiastic about the story they have to tell. For me, the best days begin when I get an e-mail from Michele Gerber saying, "I have a story idea." Ms. Gerber is a historian of the World War II and Cold War eras and a senior communications specialist with Fluor Hanford at the Hanford site. To me, however, she is simply the best contributing author I have ever worked with. And this issue features one of her best articles yet—a history of the Fernald cleanup project, beginning with how it got to be such an environmental disaster, and then discussing in detail how workers cut an overwhelming cleanup project down into more workable smaller tasks. Sometime this summer, the project will be completed, and the site will be declared closed. Oversight will then be turned over to the U.S. Department of Energy's Legacy Management for long-term stewardship.

I came to learn about Fernald really only after it had already closed. My past experiences at the American Nuclear Society, and more specifically with *Nuclear News* magazine, brought me into contact primarily with the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, not with the weapons side. Only after the end of the Cold War, when the U.S. weapons facilities be-

gan to shut down and their missions changed to cleanup, did these sites—Fernald, Rocky Flats, Hanford, Savannah River—come onto my radar screen.

Interestingly, in the early 1990s, one of my sisters, an analytical chemist specializing in water chemistry, asked me what I knew about the Fernald site. I had to admit that I knew absolutely nothing about it. My sister had been sent to Fernald to look at (and analyze) some water samples. "You have a real problem there," she told me.

How much of a problem became clearer as people began work to characterize the weapons sites to see just what they were dealing with. At American Nuclear Society meetings in the early 1990s, I listened to several presentations on the contamination problems at the former weapons sites. Most of the presenters seemed overwhelmed by the scope of the problem, and the problems at Fernald were especially troubling: old buildings that bore little resemblance to their original drawings, tons of uranium trapped in miles of piping, a contaminated water table, to name but a few of the issues cleanup planners were facing. This is a cleanup project that will last decades, most people agree.

And yet today, in mid-2006, we are anticipating the completion of the site's cleanup and its subsequent closure. How workers progressed from insurmountable problem to finished project is the subject of "Cleaning Up and Closing Down the Fernald Site," this issue's cover story, which begins on page 16. I don't want to steal any of Ms. Gerber's thunder by revealing anything that the article discusses, so I can only urge you to turn to that page immediately.

Of course, I don't want to discount the worth of the other articles in this issue. Chris Wood and Sean Bushart from EPRI discuss that organiza-



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tion's Decommissioning Technology Program, in an article beginning on page 30, and a photo essay beginning on page 36 takes you to Oregon for the demolition of the Trojan cooling tower. NRC Commissioner Jeffrey Merrifield's presentation on "the honest facts about spent fuel" from the 2006 Regulatory Information Conference is reprinted here beginning on page 39. Finally, to round out the issue, we have meeting reports from both Waste Management 2006 and the ANS 2006 International High-Level Waste Management Conference. So, as with most issues of this magazine, we have a little something for everyone. Enjoy!—*Nancy J. Zacha, Editor* ■