

What LLW Generators Really Want

As the cover and contents page announce, this edition of *Radwaste Solutions* magazine has several articles on current issues in low-level waste management. These issues include the (1) work the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is doing to “risk-inform” current LLW regulation, and (2) waste “blending” or “down-blending,” which is mixing waste having different contamination levels to bring the combined product to Class A contamination levels. Both of these issues are of interest to waste generators in the United States, primarily because of the effect either of them might have on final waste disposal options, of which there are very few these days.

The United States has one LLW disposal facility that is open to waste generators from all states: the EnergySolutions Class A disposal facility in Clive, Utah. The Barnwell, S.C., facility, also run by EnergySolutions, takes all three classes of LLW, but only from states in the Atlantic LLW Compact (South Carolina, New Jersey, and Connecticut). The Richland, Wash., facility, operated by US Ecology, takes all three classes of waste from the 11 states in the Rocky Mountain and Northwest LLW Compacts.

That means waste generators from 36 states can send Class A waste to Clive and must store Class B and C waste indefinitely. Most of the nation’s nuclear power plants are located in those 36 states, as are the majority of industrial, research, medical, and university-based LLW generators.

What’s interesting about the discussions contained in the articles in this issue is that none of them direct-

ly addresses the topic that waste generators really want to hear about: assured access to disposal capacity for all classes of LLW. Sure, there’s a chance that the Waste Control Specialists facility in Andrews County, Texas—the licensed-but-not-yet-built disposal facility for the two states in the Texas LLW Compact—will be able to take some out-of-compact waste. But the key words here are “chance” and “some,” which together do not come close to “assured.”

Instead, we are making end runs at the issue. If risk-informing NRC regulations on LLW means the elimination of waste classes (big if there), then perhaps all waste generators can send all waste to the Clive facility. And if you can blend waste down to lower levels, again, maybe you can send it all to Clive. The state of Utah, however, does not have to go along with these efforts. There’s a reason the Clive site is limited to Class A waste, and the state can set up other criteria to keep the facility limited to the lower levels of radioactive waste.

Waste generators will watch with interest these end-run efforts, all the while sighing heavily because no one is addressing the real issue: the lack of political will among states and LLW compacts to do what the law tells them to do, which is to provide disposal access for LLW generators in their jurisdictions. Waste generators want assured access to safe, well-run disposal facilities, at a cost of something less than the proverbial “arm and a leg.” They want to know at the beginning of each operating year that whatever wastes they generate in the process of doing their business—business that



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we rely on and often desperately need—can be disposed of safely and economically. It doesn’t sound like too much to ask for, but in this country at this time, it evidently is.

So, dear reader, as you read the articles in this copy of the magazine, ponder the fact that the real issue—the LLW elephant in the room—is not being addressed on these pages . . . nor anywhere else, it seems.—Nancy J. Zacha, Editor