

Visualizing Nuclear Waste

At a session on “Solving the Spent Fuel Dilemma” at the recent American Nuclear Society National Meeting (see report, this issue, page 50), researcher and pollster Ann Bisconti point out that one thing nuclear professionals could do to promote nuclear energy is to help the public “visualize” nuclear waste. The general public *thinks* “nuclear waste,” she said, and *sees* “barrels of ooze.”

Taking her concept one step further, add the word “dump” to the sentence. Now the general public sees a nuclear “Love Canal” filled with barrels of glowing poisons dumped haphazardly, silently threatening their children and families with lethal radiation. No wonder no one wants an interim spent fuel storage facility, let alone a final repository, in his or her home state or community.

I’ve already gone on record against the term “dump” as applied to nuclear disposal facilities (see “My Goat—And How To Get It,” *Radwaste Solutions*, July/August 2003, p. 5). (A reader was kind enough to send that editorial to a local reporter, who contacted me, promising never to use the word “dump” again in reference to nuclear disposal.) While the World War II-era disposal trenches at the early Manhattan Project sites might qualify as dumps (and we are cleaning those up, you know), the nuclear industry has come a long way since then in its efforts to deal with, store, and dispose of its waste products.

And then there are the “mobile Chernobyl” people, scaring the heck out of the public about nuclear waste transport, once again calling up images of dangerous materials haphazardly loaded into shoddy containers and piled up on the back of pickup trucks.

Bisconti urged nuclear professionals to show people what a spent fuel rod or spent fuel bundle looks like. And while her presentation was focused just on commercial spent fuel, not all kinds of nuclear waste, her idea is a very good one. We need to show people what nuclear waste looks like—that it is in a solid form that is readily transportable and safely stored without concerns about leakage.

This issue of the magazine does just that. What does the inside of a Hanford waste tank look like? See “Multiple Waste Retrievals at Hanford’s C Tank Farm,” page 40. What does a tank farm look like? See “Closing Waste Tanks at the Savannah River Site,” page 18. What does one of those old-time burial grounds look like? See “Cocooning Hanford’s N Reactor—And Other River Corridor Closure Activities,” page 24. What exactly does a tailings pile look like? See “DOE Reclamation Work at the Moab Site,” page 34. How do you go about remediating a contaminated stream? See “Remediation of Uranium-Impacted Sediments in a Watercourse,” page 12. In the November-December issue, we will have photos of the spent fuel being transferred from the LaCrosse BWR’s spent fuel pool to the independent spent fuel storage installation down the road.

People sometimes comment on both the quality and the quantity of the photos I pull together for the magazine. In reality, most projects take hundreds if not thousands of photos along the way, and the hard part is sifting through them. Public relations offices at both DOE facilities and commercial sites are usually



On Barrels of Ooze, Nuclear Waste Dumps, Mobile Chernobyls, and Other Textual Travesties

very generous when it comes to providing photos.

If you want to show someone what nuclear waste looks like, call the public relations office at a local site, whether commercial or government, and ask for some photos. Explain your purpose, and you will probably find a half-dozen or so photos in your e-mail inbox in no time.

And if you don’t have time for that, just take along a couple of copies of *Radwaste Solutions*. In nearly every issue, you will find plenty of photos of nuclear waste being safely disposed of.—Nancy J. Zacha, Editor ■