

Safety First

"Some people come to work just begging to get hurt. You can see it in their eyes." With these words, Richard Meservey, of the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, captured the sometimes flagrant disregard a small handful decommissioning workers have for safety regulations and practices. More often, however, it is not such obvious dismissal of safety concerns that leads to trouble. Rather, small moments of inattention can have chilling consequences.

These small moments, and their sometimes large consequences, were the focus of a session, "Safety Yields Decommissioning Successes," held at last June's American Nuclear Society Annual Meeting in Milwaukee. The session, organized by Steven Bossart, with the U.S. Department of Energy's National Energy Technology Laboratory in Morgantown, W. Va., and Richard L. Miller, of Bechtel, featured panelists from several DOE and commercial decommissioning projects discussing safety issues and concerns.

In more than one of these columns, I have mentioned just how much I learn at industry conferences and how valuable I feel such information-sharing to be. Please forgive me if I continue to focus on this topic, particularly in the case of the Decommissioning Safety session, which was certainly one of the most interesting and valuable sessions I've ever attended.

I liked this session so much that I asked the panelists to prepare articles for *Radwaste Solutions*, to enable them to share their information with a wider audience than was able to attend the Milwaukee session. Many of the panelists were pleased to submit descriptions of their experiences, and in this issue of the magazine we feature four articles on decommissioning safety—from government, commercial, and university projects.

What all the projects and all the panelists (as reflected in the articles in

this issue) have in common is a commitment to safety. Decommissioning projects resemble construction projects in the hazards they present to workers. Scaffolding, dust, and debris, not to mention radiological hazards, are just some of the obstacles decommissioning workers must deal with in their day-to-day tasks. So if safety is not the number one project goal, the rest of the goals—including those related to schedule and budget—may never be realized.

When the Big Rock Point nuclear power plant was shut down and decommissioning was started, the project's mission statement began with the following three instructions:

- Don't hurt anyone.
- Don't drop anything.
- Don't spill anything.

Only further down in the mission statement is the instruction: "Don't run out of money." Safety concerns are clearly the first priorities at Big Rock Point. But small moments of inattention to detail ended Big Rock Point's enviable 23-year run without a lost-time accident. These moments, and the site's renewed focus on safety, are the subject of "The ABCs of Decommissioning Safety" on p. 8.

Sometimes technology can solve the safety concerns of tricky decommissioning tasks. New technologies that can help decommissioning projects work more safely are the subject of articles by Steven Bossart and Danielle Blair ("Andros and Rosie and Other Friends to D&D Workers: Decommissioning Technologies That Improve Worker Safety," page 16) and by Richard Meservey ("Making Safety Work: Safety-Enhancing Technologies and Practices at INEEL Decommissioning Projects," p. 20).

Finally, when project managers analyze safety issues and concerns, obvious conclusions often turn out to be wrong. In the article on decommissioning the Tokamak Fusion Test Reactor at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory ("Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk: Focusing on



Focusing on Decommissioning Safety

Safety during Fusion Reactor Decommissioning," p. 12), Keith Rule et al. note that when lost-time accidents occurred during decommissioning, many people jumped to the conclusion that the newest, least-experienced workers must be the source of the problem. In fact, however, many of the safety problems were caused by inattention of the more experienced workers, who had been focusing on schedule, not safety. A renewed effort at the lab to bring safety concerns back to their proper place quickly followed.

In High Society, one axiom says, "You can't be too thin or too rich." In nuclear project decommissioning, the most appropriate life instruction says, "You can't be too safe."—*Nancy J. Zacha, Editor*