

US POLICIES AND TECHNICAL
PROGRESS IN LOW-LEVEL WASTE
MANAGEMENT

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LOW-LEVEL WASTES POLICY NEEDS FROM A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Please bear with me while I provide all of us with a refresher regarding a historical perspective of the waste issue. An issue, I might add, which could become more critical than the power generation issue.

Just five short years ago there were six sites licensed to accept rad-waste. Interestingly enough, they could be considered well dispersed nationally - South Carolina, Nevada, Washington, Kentucky, Illinois and New York. And then problems arose which should have signaled the events which followed - New York...closed 1975, Kentucky...closed 1977, Illinois...closed 1978. Those facilities are still closed and the prospects are not bright for their future. Regrettably, two of those states are among the largest producers of waste in the nation.

More than 34% of the nations waste is generated in the north-east quadrant, and none is accepted for disposal in that area. Even more horrendous is the fact that often thousands of miles are traversed before disposal takes place. This ludicrous process occurs every day. As a result...the danger of incident... is multiplied and the cost is becoming prohibitive. While we feign efforts at curbing inflation in two areas we have conflicting approaches: atomic power, which was once predicted to be so cheap as to make metering obsolete, is now adding to inflation. Medical cost soars out of control because, while more controls are placed upon atomic power, we force them to pay 200% increases in disposal of their rad-waste. This is somewhat reminiscent of Catch 22.

Just a year ago only the most erudite of those in the industry were even aware there was a problem, or perhaps a future problem. What has happened to cause conferences like this one? What has suddenly forced the federal administration to outline a national policy in this area? It wasn't O.P.E.C. and it wasn't a sudden attack of foresight. No, it was a phenomenon called T.M.I. -

three mile island - an incident which will have ripple effects on our children's children. If indeed there are no problems, only opportunities, then what will be the opportunity presented by the nuclear hysteria shown in the wake of T.M.I.?

The awareness level of the three governors who now bear the burden of disposing of the waste of our nation was raised to the highest levels. In unison they seemed to paraphrase the reporter in "Network" and shout "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore! We do not want to be the nations garbage dump - particularly rad-waste garbage - We have heard all the stories of the relative safety of this waste - 'Why', they laugh at us, 'You could sleep next to that barrel day and night and nothing will happen to you!' 'There is less danger in that barrel than in a tooth x-ray.' What people seem to forget is that Nevada was the site of experimental atomic weapons testing. Some experts now seem to feel that we are harvesting cancer cells for our patriotism, because of seeds planted then. You should read the assurances our citizens received when they were testing the bomb. So please spare us the scientific evidence and recognize that, all of the facts notwithstanding, the public no longer blindly trusts government officials or experts. We must heed the public perception as well as the facts."

While we are discussing facts, consider these. The governor has been in office for one + year; the disposal site has been in existence since 1962 with only one significant incident in 17 years. Since May of last year no less than 22 significant instances have occurred at Beatty -- could it be just that things were perfect then or we just care more now!

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| Fact #1 | The Fire |
| Fact #2 | The Taped Barrel |
| Fact #3 | The Barrels Uncovered |
| Fact #4 | The Closure of the Site (4 separate times) |
| Fact #5 | Revocation Procedures |
| Fact #6 | The South Carolina Announcement |
| | <u>September</u> |
| Fact #7 | Washington Closure + Legislation |

Now

Fact #8 Tri State Reciprocity Banning Agreements Whole States May Soon Be Excluded

I could relate a score more facts that, in conjunction with public perception, calls forth all of the innovativeness of the industry which is so well represented here this week. We must rationally consider a total road MPA which will capture the initiative and get us off the defensive. Governor Babbitt chairs a major NGA committee which was out in front of the administrations policy.

We all are in agreement for the first time in memory - the DOE, the NRC, FEMA, NGA, The White House and certainly the three states carrying the burden. We must have regional sites for both high- and low-level waste.

Should we rush out now and designate Beatty as a regional site? That would be wrong; now that we have the nations's attention, let's do it right.

Questions must be addressed including, but not exclusively, these -

1. How many?
2. Where?
3. Method of administration.
4. Controls.
5. Mechanism for establishment.

Allow me to expand on these and perhaps generate some ideas.

- #1. A determination must be made of the number of such sites needed to take care of the low-level radioactive waste for the entire nation, not just our region.
 - a. It is not feasible for a group of states to arbitrarily start a regional disposal site because the result may be more sites than are really needed.
 - b. Data is now available on low-level waste being generated in our nation, but the density of production per geographical section of the nation must be determined. This will certainly dictate the number of sites needed.

#2. Once the number of sites needed are determined, then their optimum location must consider a number of things, including:

- a. Conservation of energy in transport of radio-active waste. California is among top three.
- b. Fitness for long-term disposal upon evaluation of geological and hydrological conditions.
- c. Density of waste production within the area in the predictable future.

Assuming these things could be settled and a site were selected - How should it be administered?

- a. Should it be operated by an authority of all of the states designated in the region?
Advantages: Equal representation.
Disadvantages: Inefficient administration - TRPA example
- b. Should a public agency operate the site or should private industry be the operator?
- c. Should the home state contract with an industry and all costs be paid by users from the participating states?
- d. Agreement among the participating states on routing of shipments to the site, control would be more possible.
- e. Indemnification of the home state by participating states - who will be liable?

In the event of accident or suit by our grandchildren? This issue must be settled.

Controls must be in place which we don't have now:

- a. Only truckload shipments would be accepted at the site.
- b. Each user must have a quality assurance program designed to insure radioactive waste will be packaged

in accordance with all applicable regulations and specified site conditions.

- c. A permit system will be used, with each participating state issuing permits to the brokers in their state. The state must control their own users.
- d. Participating states must provide inspection of the packaging practices of their brokers.
- e. A uniform point system would be needed by the participating states to determine whether a waste permit should be suspended or revoked, much like the driver license system.
- f. Uniform re-instatement procedures must also be developed and used by the participating states.
- g. States must have the power to levy fines for violations.

Finally how do we establish this? In my view,

- a. The national governor's conference must direct the organization in concert with the three states with commercial sites and the experience.
- b. NRC and the agreement states must provide data on the volume of low-level waste, the density of production, and future generation.
- c. USGA and EPA must provide standards and information on suitable geographical areas for sites.
- d. DOE must sponsor research contracts on burial limits per site, improvements in containment procedures for sites, and volume reduction methods.
- e. DOE and EPA must provide control and routing for waste shipments.
- f. After location of the sites has been determined and designation of the states whose citizens use each particular site, the manner of administration of the site should be left to the participating states.

This blueprint, or sketch, or perspective on regional sites must be considered. The movement toward interim storage sites or DOE sites is not the answer! The states, and not the federal officials have brought this issue to a head, and we must not release the pressure. With the leadership of Governor Babbitt, Governor List and others, and your expertise, we can get the job done. We created atomic power - we created waste - let us not allow one to spell the end of the other.