LEARNING TO PROGRAM YOUR VCR AND OTHER TECHNOLOGY DEPLOYMENT CHALLENGES…

Beverly A. Cook, Manager U.S. DOE Idaho Operations Office
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"The main dangers in this life are the people who want to change everything -- or nothing".[1] I recently took a survey at the Idaho Operations Office. There are a lot of different types of people in this world. Some of them can be classified as the "Gotta-Have-Gagits" types. You know them…they always have the latest computers, software, palm-pilots, cell phones and any other electronic device that is featured at the local Circuit City. Then there are the "technology avoiders". These are the folks that refuse to buy a computer because they are afraid it will steal their credit cards numbers. I believe most people are somewhere in between these two extremes. I refer to them as the "Show-Me-A-Technology-I-Can't-Live-Withouts." I fall into this category, and like most people, I'm still learning to program my VCR! Over my life, I have acquired lots of gadgets. Some of these, were once touted as the latest and greatest advancements in technology everyone must have. Unfortunately, they never lived up to their expectations. In fact, I can't even remember why I acquired some of them in the first place or even worse why I haven't thrown them out long ago. Yet, there are lots of inventions I cannot live without. I've found the REAL "Can't-Live-With-Out" innovations meet at least one of four criteria: 1) they increase my convenience; 2) they are cheaper to use, 3) they do things faster – giving me more free time; or, 4) they provide a capability to do things I couldn't do before I owned them.

As the Manager of the Department of Energy's Idaho Operations Office, I have a responsibility to continuously improve safety and operational efficiency. The implementation of new technologies in DOE's current operations, especially environmental cleanup operations and activities are key to ensuring continuous improvement. However, all technologies are not created equal. Much like the "Can't-Live-With-Out" innovations in my personal life, we have to ensure the technologies we develop and implement meet the relevance criteria that makes them worthy of deploying. Are they more cost effective? Can we conduct remediation more expeditiously? Does the technology allow us to achieve cleanup to goals previously thought impossible?

Not only must we ensure that cleanup decisions are based on the best available technology, but we must ensure that today's cleanup decisions do not preclude better solutions in the future. Looking back over the advancements in technology that have been made during the last decade it is hard to imagine the magnitude of advancements that will be made over the next several decades. Is it possible that someday we will have the technology to beam buried transuranic waste out of the ground safely and cost effectively? Completing the Department of Energy's environmental management mission is our responsibility but so is providing long-term stewardship of our nation's resources. I believe our biggest challenge is to ensure the technologies we deploy today are viewed as the right cleanup decisions tomorrow. In the mean time, I'm going to work on learning to program my VCR.

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[1] Lady Nancy Astor (1879 - 1964) English stateswoman