

## LUNCH SPEAKER

### SITING A LOW-LEVEL WASTE DISPOSAL SITE-PROGRESS BEING MADE IN NORTH CAROLINA AND THE SOUTHEAST

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I am very pleased to have the opportunity to share with you my perspectives both as an employee of a utility that is a generator of low-level radioactive waste and as a member of a siting authority responsible for establishing a regional disposal facility by 1993. I continue to believe the greatest challenges facing policy makers are of a socio-economic and political nature not scientific or technical. We in north carolina and the southeast are indeed fortunate to have a combination of institutions, resources and leaders which have allowed us to make good progress toward our ultimate objective.

I will mention but a few accomplishments to update you on our current status. From the outset, I acknowledge that some other states and compacts may be ahead of us in achieving certain key steps. However, the fact that north carolina, the southeast and others continue to move forward is noteworthy. My optimism should stimulate other states and regions not making similar progress to take affirmative action.

The most important secret to success with any project is the people involved. While the North Carolina Authority was plagued in the early stages with turnover in key positions, our situation has stabilized under the able leadership of Dr. Ray Murray as our Chairman and Tenney Deane as our Executive Director. Our authority is a diverse group of public-spirited citizens who have a wide range of talents and experiences. They come from academia, business, industry and the public at large. (1) We have a small but very dedicated professional staff. In addition, the authority has been able to attract highly qualified consultants for the detailed tasks. To name a few, Ebasco Services is doing the preliminary site screening; Charles T. Main is assisting in bid evaluations; and Walter Vannoy, former President of Babcock & Wilcox, is serving as business advisor to the Authority. Certainly we have had strong political leadership to form our compact and create the siting authority. Particularly noteworthy have been the statesmanlike positions taken by Governor Martin of North Carolina and Representative George Miller in the North Carolina General Assembly who also serves as one of our two Compact Commissioners. The other Commissioner is Captain Bill Briner of the Duke University Medical Center who is probably also known to you for his testimony before congress on behalf of the medical community during debate over the Low-level Waste Policy Act.

The assistance and cooperation of other state organizations are important ingredients in the progress made to date. Recognition is due Dr. Earl MacCormac, Science Advisor to the Governor, Kathryn Visocki of the Southeast Compact Commission, Ralph McAlister and Dr. Linda Little of the Governor's Waste Management Board, Dr. Edward Burt and Dr. Jeffrey Reid of Natural Resources and Community Development, Dayne Brown of the Radiation

Protection Section, and George Givens and Steven Rose of the general assembly staff.

The knowledge base of the project has been substantially enhanced by contact with federal agencies, especially the department of energy through EG&G Idaho and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. These support and facilitate the low-level waste forum and the host state technical coordinating committee, which illuminate the dimensions of both social and technical issues through conferences and workshops.

We are also fortunate to have two experienced and qualified companies bidding to design and operate the regional disposal facility Chem-nuclear Systems, Inc., And Westinghouse Electric Corporation. Selection of a contractor is scheduled for June of this year following contract negotiations with both firms.

The authority has adopted site screening criteria that include a wide range of considerations such as geologic, hydrologic, and environmental factors. Ebasco Services, led by Dr. Sam Khoury, has developed a very detailed and sophisticated computer-based mapping procedure that Utilizes the Land Resources Information Service (LRIS) of the State of North Carolina. Phase I of the site screening, announced on november 30, 1988, identified 38 percent (38%) of the state's land area as potentially suitable. We are now into phase II of the screening process which is expected to be completed by June of this year and will narrow candidate areas to approximately 8 to 10 percent (8-10%) of the state. At least two sites are scheduled to be selected for characterization by August of this year.

Considerable time and resources have already been devoted to the public participation aspects of this project. For example, public meetings were held over and beyond those required by law in the process of adopting siting criteria and procedures. Three regional meetings were held across the state in october of last year at which time the two bidders made public presentations on their proposals and citizens were given an opportunity to ask questions. The proceedings of these meetings, including answers to all questions, were compiled into a 90-page report. In december of last year, six regional meetings were conducted around the state where Ebasco presented their findings from Phase I of the site screening study.

At the suggestion of public interest groups, the authority arranged to have a panel of the North Carolina Academy of Science Review the activities of Ebasco Services. The group of experts endorsed the methodology and made some valuable suggestions.

To further assure that the general public would have ample opportunity to be heard, persons representing public interest and environmental groups, business and industry, and local government were invited to participate regularly in meetings of the standing committees--technical, external

relations, and legal and finance. Community forums will be held across the state in 26 smaller towns to address siting and safety issues. Participating are authority members, staff members, health physics society volunteers, and representatives of the contractors. The forums started in February and continue through April. I think all the above show our commitment to an open process.

Our state and region are blessed with factors which have positively influenced the decision-making process and which I believe will allow us to ultimately site a safe and efficient facility. For the remaining portion of my time, I intend to talk about some of those things which have or will in the future contribute to our continued success.

I have narrowed my list to three main factors which I think have contributed the most to our progress to date. The first and perhaps the most important factor is a climate in which all interests are given an opportunity to present their arguments and where rational, reasonable and fair decisions can be based on credible facts not fear or emotion or misinformation. Among the indicators are:

- a generally higher level of dependence upon nuclear energy in the south and a correspondingly higher level of acceptance by the general population.
- Elected officials who tend to be more conservative or traditional in their philosophy, who strictly adhere to moral obligations such as those contained in our regional compact, and who are mostly parttime legislators motivated by public service.
- Strong legislative and executive leadership like that cited earlier, stable governmental institutions, and honest, capable staff. Each generally enjoys the public's respect and support.
- A commitment to a broad public education program providing credible information from sources in addition to the news media.

The second contributing factor might be characterized as a framework of reasonable laws and regulations from which to operate. Much of this is due to the political climate mentioned above. Some more important features are:

- the combination of incentives and penalties embodied in the federal law and now incorporated into the southeast compact and north carolina authority laws.
- Linking specific objectives to milestones that measure progress and can be used to apply the penalty-reward system.
- Rotating a state's burden of hosting a disposal facility. In the case of the southeast, no state will be required to host a facility longer than 20 years or until it has accepted 32 million cubic feet of waste, whichever occurs first.
- Comprehensive requirements that address a wide range of concerns from multiple, engineered barriers

to generous benefits and incentives for the host community.

The final factor contributing to our progress so far relates to the source and quantity of waste generation in our state and region. The complexity of dealing with eight states in the compact has at times been challenging. On the other hand, the total volumes from the nation's largest compact should allow the incremental base charge for disposal to remain very competitive and also justify expenditure of an amount which will guarantee a state-of-the-art facility. In our state and region, we have waste generators such as hospitals, universities and pharmaceutical manufacturers that utilize nuclear materials and are viewed by politicians as members of a protected class what I call the "white hat guys." In addition, the region currently hosts one of the three operational disposal facilities and ten nuclear utilities with thirty-two operating reactors. Fortunately for us, our state and region have knowledgeable experts who have volunteered to speak out on the issue, to remind the public of the contribution radioactive materials make to the quality of their life, and to emphasize that every citizen has a stake in successfully siting a needed new disposal facilities.

Within the state and southeast region, I continue to be encouraged that legislative proposals intended to strengthen the authority and compact have been enacted; initiatives such as withdrawal from the compact have been soundly defeated. Nationally, the 100th Congress, by giving its stamp of approval to the appalachian and southwest compacts, has completed the ratification process for the nine regional compacts. Overtures to revisit the compacting issue or to dismantle the present policy have also been rebuffed. On another encouraging front, American Nuclear Insurers recently announced it has rescinded the two-year-old suspension of insurance for new disposal facilities. Finally, the governors of our three current host states have recently indicated their resolve to strictly enforce the current milestones and have acted swiftly to bar access to generators in noncompliance states (New Hampshire and Vermont). We continue to watch the situation in the mid-west compact where governor blanchard of Michigan has halted siting activities and is urging the congress to reopen the Low-level Waste Policy Act. I do not expect North Carolina will be interested in joining that movement. All these developments indicate the present national policy is working. In other words, our national leaders believe we are making good progress and to borrow a cliché, "we should stay the course."

What then can impede the desired goal of siting the new disposal facilities that are needed? Again to paraphrase a well-worn line: "we have met the enemy and it is us." Speaking particularly to the generating community, we must look beyond our short term self-interests for the long-term common good.

Among the four main categories of generators utilities, industrial, institutional/research and medical there are wide differences in volumes, curies and hazards in our various waste streams. Arguably, large generators may subsidize the cost of disposal for small quantity generators. Perhaps hospitals can store rather than dispose short-lived wastes

on-site and therefore do not feel the immediacy of the threatened denial of access. In the end, the entire nuclear industry should balance all these competing interests on a fair and equitable basis and never lose sight of the long-term objectives just because of slight differences which occasionally divide us.

There are other stakeholders besides generators who may have competing interests which could hinder progress. For example, there are rival vendors seeking the business opportunities. Interestingly, in our compact we have at least three categories of states, each with unique concerns: the current host state (South Carolina); the designated second host state (North Carolina); and the remaining states all eligible to be selected to serve as host state number three. Our elected officials, regulators, compact commissioners, and siting authorities all serve very diverse constituencies. Each state's dependence on nuclear energy, nuclear power plant outage schedules and percentage of generation from sources other than power plants all vary widely. Subdividing each state into electoral districts, there are also wide differences in an elected official's attitude depending on whether his district produces waste or is a potentially suitable site for a disposal facility. The level of controversy surrounding siting also varies depending upon the election cycle, unanticipated events that attract widespread media attention and organized efforts by opposition groups. We also all recognize the differences which exist among the sited and unsited states and regions. Similarly, we know that the stages of progress or the level of intensity toward the siting effort in states and regions vary widely. Therefore, we can expect increasing pressure from some who are not as far along in the process to seek modification of the uniform federal policy to accommodate growing political pressures locally. Finally, we recognize the extraordinary leverage sometimes wielded by the current and proposed host states relating to technology selection and fee setting.

To further pose potential obstacles to the siting process, I also believe low-level waste management tends to be an "orphan" issue both within industry and government. What I mean by this is that no single individual or department has overall responsibility for decision-making. Instead, management of the low-level radioactive waste issues requires a team of experts specializing in the various technical, legal, financial and communications aspects.

In conclusion, I hope to leave you with the following challenges as you participate in this year's waste management symposium:

- whatever your role in the nuclear community public official, contractor, vendor, generator, or regulator -do not lose sight of the good progress which has already been made toward establishing new disposal sites. Concentrate on what got us to this point and how to build upon the successes.
- Recognize the accomplishments made in this field and that siting the first low-level radioactive waste disposal facility is within our grasp in the early 90's. Can we say the same for other waste forms high level, hazardous or even solid waste? Should not we then

take pride in these facts and begin to think of low-level waste management in terms of the safest and best-regulated system to serve as a role model for other siting efforts in and out of the nuclear field?

- Dedicate more time, attention and resources to low-level radioactive waste management issues in light of the good progress so none of the current momentum is lost.
- Encourage and support those states and regions which are making good progress but remind the others who are not following their lead to do so at their own peril.
- Defer to the judgment of those closest to the issue. For example, outsiders should avoid the temptation to interfere with issues that may adversely impact local or state politics of the host state or community.
- Finally, there can never be a time when the public is too educated. If everyone associated with the process will just make a little more effort to become involved and proactive, we all can benefit.

When we finally do succeed, I would like to see the nuclear industry, of which you are a member, take its rightful place in a leadership role and be recognized as a safe, responsible technology that benefits our society and its people.

#### 1. List of members of the North Carolina Low-level Radioactive Waste Management Authority

Raymond L. Murray, Ph.D., Chairman  
Raleigh, North Carolina

Constance Kalbach Walker, Ph.D., Vice Chairman  
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