

Department of Energy is in the process of producing a final Environmental Impact Statement on the same subject, having released a draft version in July of 1998. The DOE is also devising a plan for spending \$200 million on Russian disposition of weapons-grade plutonium, which is more than was budgeted for in the US program for fiscal year 1999. How this money is spent is critical to the direction of the disposition program here in the US and abroad.

Conclusion

MOX technology represents Cold War thinking. In the last 50 years, the DOE nuclear weapons complex has resulted in unprecedented contamination that will take until 2070 to clean up, cost at least \$150 billion, and more credible estimates suggest that it could take longer and cost more. MOX is more of the same technology that contributed to this huge environmental legacy. MOX is technologically complicated, it will cost in the range of billions of dollars, it will increase the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and it doesn't solve the problem of excess weapons plutonium. Immobilization is a credible and viable option that will be used in any scenario currently under consideration. By continuing to pursue plutonium fuel, we are simply increasing risk, environmental degradation, and cost.

Address correspondence to Brad Morse, Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, 1801 18th Street NW, #9-2, Washington, DC 20009; (fax) 202-234-9536; (e-mail) bamorse@earthlink.net

The Personal Connection

Marc C. Bruner, PhD

It seems that the strength of people's emotional response to environmental issues is often related to the sense of connection they have to the matter at hand. Sometimes environmental issues are supported in the abstract, such as wilderness, when most people don't go there, or endangered species, when most people won't ever see them, but often a more direct connection

seems to evoke a deeper response. I'm sure that our colleagues that deal with public involvement see this sometimes.

In solid waste management, one of the most common personal connections is the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) response, which is a subset of the larger BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything) syndrome. This is the negative side of the personal connection we deal with when siting new facilities. But there is a positive connection that I have often seen, and it is worth mentioning, and trying to build upon when we can.

In their daily lives, a lot of the members of the public I interact with do not seem to sense that they have a direct impact on protecting or improving the environment. Air quality, greenhouse gases, hazardous waste and drinking water quality all appear beyond their control, or at least seem to be. The personal choices and decisions that lead to improvements in these areas don't seem to draw as direct a personal connection. In some cases, technology has made the improvements, and they are transparent to the individual and involve no personal choice. You can't make the choice to buy a car without a catalytic converter, chlorofluorocarbons have been removed from aerosol cans and air conditioning systems, water treatment plants implement technologies to reduce trihalomethanes, and the individual has "done" nothing. At this point, most people can't make a choice of how the electricity they consume is produced. This detachment can lead people to focus their interest on issues where they feel a more personal connection.

One thing people do every day is generate solid waste. It often moves directly from their hand to the trash can. They take it to the curb, put it in the recycling bin, the compost pit, the garbage disposal, or some other place. They make choices and decisions every day with what they do with their solid waste. This seems to create a closer personal connection between solid waste as an environmental issue and the general public than many other issues.

When I meet people and tell them I work as an environmental professional, they are

interested. When I tell them I work in solid waste management, they are engaged. Parents speak proudly of their children and how diligent they are at recycling. If they have a compost bin, I hear about it. I hear about how they do it "back home", either better or worse than here. I often hear what I've come to call the "shooting rats at the dump" story from people old enough to have been around in the bad old days of waste management. I never got the same level of involvement and response from people when I worked in other areas of environmental management, such as wetlands. I attribute this to the personal connection.

This could only be a slightly interesting observation, but I think it may point to a larger issue. Public support of sound environmental management may ultimately depend on the strength of the personal connection people feel with the environment. As professionals, I hope we all feel a strong connection, and one of our challenges is to help the general public make that personal connection. Lest someone misunderstand me, I'm not necessarily suggesting advocacy, like the environmental activist groups. I'm thinking of a greater level of general knowledge and awareness. If we as professionals can promote a higher level of awareness, I believe a more positive personal connection with environmental management and its issues is possible for the general public. I think this would be good for the public, the profession, and the environment. The greater the level of knowledge and commitment, the better we are able to face decisions, and make the right choices, even if they are hard ones.

Address correspondence to Marc C. Bruner, Solid Waste Authority of Palm Beach County, 7501 North Jog Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33412; (e-mail) mcbruner@swa.org