

AFTERWORD: THE BEGINNINGS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Part Six of this volume addressed so-called "remaining uncertainties." In fact, those discussed do not exhaust the topic; significant uncertainties will remain until a full range of commercial-size nuclear power plants is fully decommissioned. Because immediate and total dismantlement for most reactors is not expected for many years, several uncertainties are unlikely to be resolved to the satisfaction of the public in the near future. Thus, despite the growing frequency of reactor retirements, a significant segment of the public must accept on faith that the funds collected actually will be adequate, that the applied contingency factors are appropriate, that rising costs of waste handling will not result in substantial undercollection, that premature decommissioning will not occur very often, and that local authorities fully appreciate their economic roles. Such a level of faith is not likely to materialize. The public is certain to become more involved in the decommissioning debate, and is likely to call for prompt dismantlement despite the extra radiation hazards and need for remote equipment.

Thus, the full impact of possible public intervention cannot be predicted with accuracy. There clearly is an optimism within the international nuclear community that decommissioning will proceed without difficulty. But a word of caution is warranted. The public may force actions we do not now fully anticipate, as has happened often in the past on issues such as waste handling, emergency preparedness, operator training, and facility siting.

The topic of economics, as discussed here, represents only one of several related to decommissioning which are likely to stimulate interest and attention in the future. Thus, this volume represents but the first of a needed series on the public links to decommissioning.

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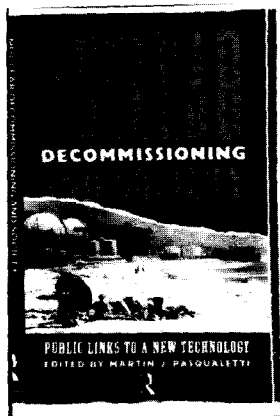
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Martin J. Pasqualetti, Editor

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