

(Not so) happy anniversary

It would be a mistake to assign too much value to anniversaries. After all, they merely mark arbitrary points in time. Recognizing important past events, however, can be an instructive, if not cathartic, exercise. Anniversaries remind us of what is important, show us how far (or not) we have come, and point us to a (hopefully) better future. Just as a physical landmark will demarcate an important location, the temporal milestone of an anniversary will demarcate an important moment in time.

This year will see a number of notable anniversaries, including the centennial of the armistice to end World War I and the 50th anniversary of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which was opened for signing on July 1, 1968. The year 2018 is also the 50th anniversary of the release of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the debut of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

There is, however, another less satisfying anniversary being marked this year, and that is the 20th anniversary of the U.S. government's failure to act on its nuclear waste commitments under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA). By January 31, 1998, the Department of Energy was to start accepting the nation's used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste and moving it to a permanent repository. Looking back, 1998 was not a particularly

good year. It is also the year of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and, at the risk of sounding flippant, the end of TV's *Seinfeld*.

While few in the nuclear industry need reminding of the NWPA's unfortunate anniversary, the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) used it as an opportunity to urge lawmakers to act on nuclear waste and provide

*Another year
passes, and another
missed deadline is
remembered.*

funding for the Yucca Mountain license review. In a press release, NARUC noted that the DOE's failure to take possession of used fuel has cost taxpayers more than \$5 billion, and damages could reach more than \$29 billion by 2022. "Taxpayers and ratepayers have poured literally billions into the federal nuclear waste program, and the liability costs continue to increase every day we delay," NARUC President John Betkoski III said in the release.

It is an encouraging sign that President Trump's 2019 fiscal year budget once again includes \$120 million for Yucca Mountain, and that the Nuclear Regulatory

Commission is asking for nearly \$50 million for work related to the Nevada repository. And yet, given the fate of past budgets, it is difficult to see any headway being made anytime soon. The political will, it seems, is still not quite there.

In the absence of any substantial progress being made, however, there are some things being done to help clear the path, so to speak. The DOE, through an integrated waste management system, continues to plan for the eventual large-scale transport of used fuel from reactor sites. As part of this effort, the department has commissioned a number of studies aimed at zeroing in on the best routes for shipping used fuel from power plants to a hypothetical storage/disposal facility (see "Getting Rid of Inventory," starting on page 57).

Likewise, utilities and reactor operators, facing indefinite storage periods, are stepping up their aging management strategies. This includes everything from maintaining safe criticality control in spent fuel pools over longer periods (see page 40) to ensuring the integrity of dry storage systems over multiple decades.

While we wait for political direction, there is some reassurance that we are not sitting idly by. But then again, let's hope that we will not be "celebrating" this anniversary again in another 20 years.—*Tim Gregoire, Editor*