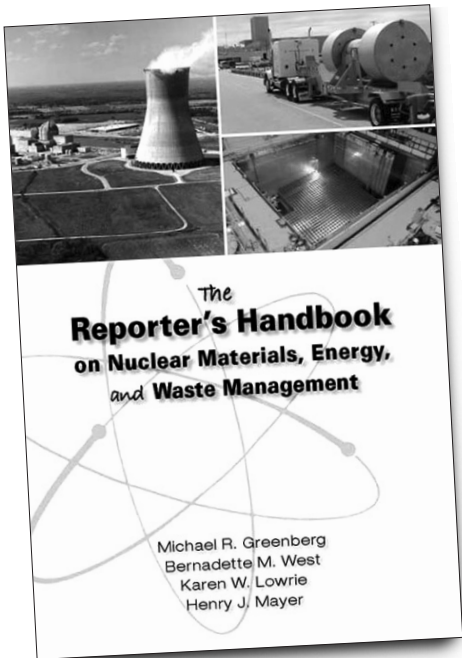


# REVIEWS



## **The Reporter's Handbook on Nuclear Materials, Energy, and Waste Management**

Michael R. Greenberg, Bernadette M. West, Karen W. Lowrie, and Henry J. Mayer  
Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009  
320 pp., \$29.95, paperback  
ISBN 978-0-8265-1660-2

Having talked with dozens of reporters on nuclear-related issues for more than 30 years, I can attest that a good reporter's handbook could be very useful not only for reporters but also for experts and citizens being interviewed or providing stories. Since there are very few reporters specializing in nuclear issues, much time in many interviews is taken explaining basic information rather than discussing the current event or story. Those explanations can be complicated, so concise summaries of basic issues could help reporters understand the topics and provide the person imparting information with a framework to clearly discuss the issues. A summary of different points of view and suggestions for good questions and answers could also be useful. And, a good glossary of terms could provide clear explanations of common and not-so common terminology, again making the best use of everyone's valuable time.

Unfortunately, despite some useful information, *The Reporter's Handbook on Nuclear Materials, Energy, and Waste Management* is a disappointment. It largely fails in two essential areas — not meeting journalistic standards of checking with multiple sources and, in too many instances, not meeting journalistic or academic standards of accuracy.

Some of the errors and omissions are surprising in light of the book's preface, which states that the authors interviewed leading experts from universities, business, government, and citizens groups. Some of the briefs will appear to be slanted in one direction or the other because experts, like everyone else, have viewpoints. Yet, it was critical for us that the book be as balanced as possible. Consequently, every brief in the book has been reviewed by an external panel of individuals who, while they may have different viewpoints, have expertise on this subject.

Among the listed contributors — "Experts Interviewed or Consulted" — is Dr. Seth Tuler, who was interviewed for the chapter entitled "Risk Communication and Nuclear Materials." When asked about his involvement, he stated that about a year after the interview he was sent a draft chapter. He made various comments about the chapter, but received no feedback. When he read the published book, he could see that his comments were largely ignored. Neither he, nor any reader, could tell which parts of the chapter were based on his interview. That practice contrasts markedly with my personal experience, wherein academic sources allow me to review specific quotes or parts of the manuscript to ensure that they correctly incorporated my input. Even when reporters are on tight deadlines and do not have time for such additional checking, they frequently include quotations or other means, so readers can judge the sources. The writers of this handbook did not follow that practice.

The book's risk communication chapter begins with the important premise that those in charge of nuclear materials "need to provide information to the residents of surrounding communities and all those potentially impacted by risks associated with these activities, and they need to listen to community concerns." But that first paragraph and the entire chapter then specifically focus on Department of Energy (DOE) sites without pointing out that there are more than 70 nuclear power plant sites lacking citizen advisory boards, in contrast to the few DOE sites discussed. The chapter also states: "There are notification requirements about certain activities, such as shipments that might pass through communities or building demolitions that might impact neighborhood communities, but these do not have to address risk specifically (10 CFR pt. 71)." If anyone reading that sentence believes that there are public notices about nuclear shipments, they would be wrong. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regulation (10 CFR 71.97) requires advance notification only to the designee of the governor of each affected state. Furthermore, the regulation (part 71) concerns only nuclear materials transportation, not "building demolitions."

There are other obvious factual errors. The chapter on nuclear waste policy states that the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico is for "transuranic waste generated from nuclear power plants and military facilities." In fact, all nuclear power plant waste is prohibited at WIPP. The third sentence of that same chapter states: "The more radioactive the waste is, the more stringent the regulations for how it is stored, transported, and collected at disposal sites." That statement is demonstrably wrong in several ways. Radioactive waste stored at DOE sites is exempt from regulation by the Atomic Energy Act. The advance notification requirements for transporting waste described in the preceding paragraph apply to the NRC's commercial licensees, not to DOE shipments.

Existing disposal sites are, in the case of WIPP only for transuranic waste, or for DOE and commercial low-level wastes (LLW); but the Environmental Protection Agency regulations for the proposed Yucca Mountain repository — for the most highly radioactive wastes — are in many ways less stringent than those for WIPP. Moreover, DOE's LLW disposal sites are not subject to regulations. The commercial LLW disposal sites have differing regulatory requirements largely established by state licensing agencies and often not based on the amount of radioactivity. This chapter's third sentence also is contradicted by the chapter on nuclear waste "classification, management and disposition," which correctly states: "Waste is classified by federal laws, regulations, and rules, and this classification has evolved during the history of nuclear material uses and does not necessarily correspond to hazard levels." Nor does classification depend on the amount of radioactivity. For example, some "low-level" waste is much more radioactive than some "high-level" waste.

The handbook includes three parts — getting started, briefs, and additional resources. Part I covers how to use the handbook, why now, crosscutting themes, and "Covering Nukes: Play Hard, but Play Fair." The authors suggest that readers seeking a definition or quick explanation use the glossary, which is 35 pages and has much useful information, but contains some factual errors. For example, "remote-handled (RH) waste" is said to be transuranic waste with a dose rate at the container surface of up to 1,000 rems per hour. But some RH wastes have higher levels of radioactivity. The 1,000-rems-per-hour limit is on RH wastes for disposal at WIPP. The "Covering Nukes" section, written by Tom Henry, a long-time reporter at the *Toledo Blade*, is extremely useful in giving advice to less-experienced reporters and helping experts understand how they can be most useful to a reporter.

Part II is 190 pages and contains 21 "briefs" (chapters) of 2,500 to 4,000 words on specific subjects, including

civilian uses of nuclear energy; nuclear waste management; nuclear weapons, terrorism, and nonproliferation; and both risk perception and communication. Each chapter has an author (or authors), mentions one or more people who were interviewed, and includes their comments. One chapter has a named person as reviewer, and the preface states that there was a board of reviewers. As already noted, though various experts are named, it is not possible to determine the specific contributions of those who were interviewed, commented, or reviewed. Each chapter also has some sources or references listed, but only the glossary specifies (frequently) a particular source.

Part III, in addition to the glossary, has four subsections — History of Nuclear Power, Important Federal Legislation and Regulations, American Nuclear Society Position Statements, and Background on seven key organizations — Institute of Nuclear Power Operations, Nuclear Energy Institute, International Atomic Energy Agency, World Association of Nuclear Operators, Licensing Support Network, Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, and Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste and Materials. The comprehensive index assists in finding particular subjects and people.

Although the handbook is purportedly for reporters, there is no discussion about which reporters (other than Tom Henry) were involved and whether they were consulted about what information and topics would be most useful. Virtually all of the contributors are from academia or are officials of the Department of Energy (which provided funding but not editorial control), so they do not span the range of people with whom reporters communicate when working on stories about nuclear issues. Unfortunately, this is not a handbook to recommend to reporters. And since the work was paid for by the Department of Energy, it's also a disappointing use of taxpayers' money.

— DON HANCOCK

**Order From:**  
Vanderbilt University Press  
Nashville, TN 37235  
[www.VanderbiltUniversityPress.com](http://www.VanderbiltUniversityPress.com)

## *In Memoriam:*



**Rose Wilson Ebaugh** was an active citizen of the Navajo Nation and the city of Albuquerque. In addition to being a loving mom, daughter, sister, and grandmother, she was devoted to Diné and Native justice issues. She was an alumna of the University of New Mexico. As a student, she was a member of the KIVA club and worked with SAGE Council and the National Indian Youth Council. She led "Get Out the Native Vote" drives, in addition to promoting awareness to issues of domestic violence and critical Native health issues in Albuquerque. She was employed with First Nations as a social worker.

Rose is survived by her three sons: Joseph Ebaugh, Justin Ebaugh, and Carson Lafferty. As many of her family, friends, and colleagues have expressed, we will miss her very much.