

## **Social Acceptability Problems in the Toxic and Nuclear Waste Realm : An Advertising Perspective**

JOSE JAVIER CALERO<sup>1</sup> and CARLO A. ARCILLA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Zenith OptiMedia, Manila, Philippines*

<sup>2</sup>*Science and Society Program, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City,  
Philippines*

There has been a recent openness of the nuclear waste disposal industry aimed at attracting concerned populace involvement in making decisions on the siting of nuclear waste repositories. Whereas in the past, the strategy had been to “announce, and then defend”, deep-rooted opposition to nuclear repository siting has forced a “let everyone get involved” paradigm. It still remains to be seen whether such an openness will eventually result in successful siting of nuclear waste repositories. From an advertising perspective, convincing communities wholesale that nuclear waste, while long-lasting, can be handled safely in the long-term, is a tough job. One main reason for the difficulty is that anti-nuclear waste sentiment is not only deeply rooted, but is constantly being reinforced, especially in the media. To illustrate, quite a number of recent movies, for example, have “nuclear accidents”, “nuclear mafia”, “nuclear proliferation”, etc. as overriding or at least secondary themes. Many times, environmental criminals who indiscriminately deposit nuclear and toxic wastes that harm populace are the villains of the day. To erase the social stigma associated with nuclear waste will require not only openness but a long-term, mosaic, block-by-block process. It will not only require deft public relations, but will probably require providing alternative mainstream media personalities tackling the cause of responsible nuclear and toxic waste disposal (not a very attractive movie line in itself), analogous to the current success of Crichton’s *State of Fear*, which tackles public perception of global warming. Many scientists involved in the nuclear industry are convinced that the science behind nuclear waste disposal is solid, but lack the wherewithal to influence a deeply skeptical public opinion. The approach to change perceptions will also be culture dependent. From experience in advertising work in the Philippines, for example, if the United States finally allows the commissioning of a commercial nuclear waste repository, this event would substantially help sell the idea to the Philippine populace. It must be noted, however, that a US-built and designed nuclear power plant, already completed, did not even begin operations in the Philippines due to severe social acceptability problems.