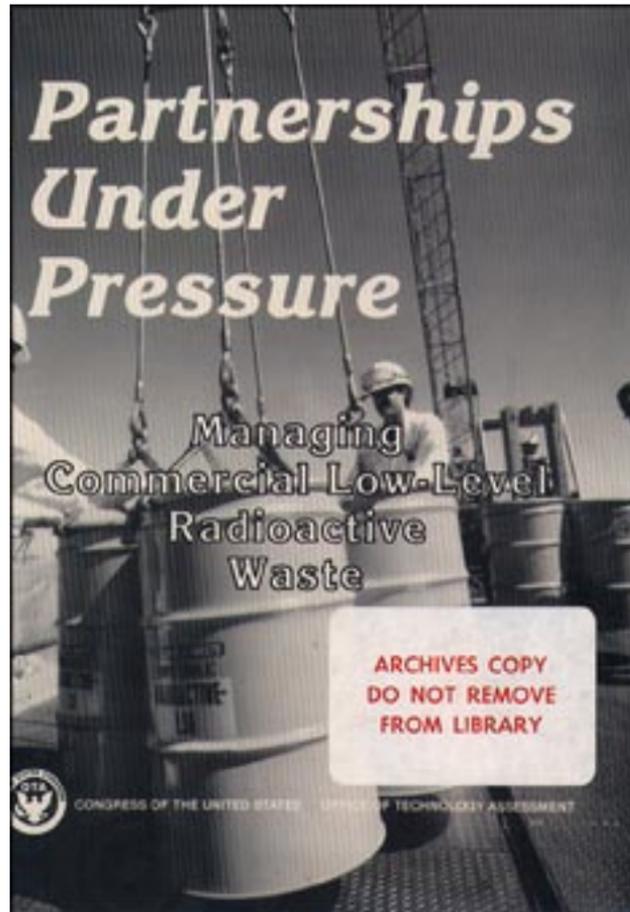


*Partnerships Under Pressure: Managing  
Commercial Low-Level Radioactive Waste*

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# Foreword

Almost 5 years have passed since the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Amendments Act was enacted. The law establishes milestones and deadlines for States to develop disposal facilities for their low-level radioactive waste (LLW). Partnerships between States, called compacts, are encouraged to develop these facilities because of the small national volume of LLW. While most States and compacts are on track for developing facilities for most of their LLW, few States are far along in developing disposal capacity for mixtures of low-level and hazardous waste—so-called “mixed LLW.”

OTA’s study on managing LLW, including mixed LLW, was undertaken at the request of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. The Committee asked OTA to analyze States’ progress in developing disposal facilities for LLW and mixed LLW and to evaluate any existing problems in managing mixed LLW.

This report provides an overview of progress made by nine compacts and the remaining unaffiliated States in developing disposal facilities. Disposal costs have more than tripled while LLW volumes have dropped by more than half over the last decade. Since many costs associated with developing and operating a disposal facility are fixed, unit disposal costs will increase substantially as new facilities open. This may lead States to consider the economics of cooperative arrangements, which would permit them to trade waste services and construct fewer full-service disposal facilities.

A small percent of LLW is labeled mixed LLW because it also contains components classified as hazardous under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Jurisdiction over mixed LLW disposal falls jointly to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency. Unfortunately, some regulations aimed at mixed LLW are unattainable, inconsistent, or duplicative. Unless current regulations are revised, generators of mixed LLW (e.g., industries, hospitals, nuclear power plants, and laboratories) are left with three options: stop producing the waste (which can mean going out of business), illegally store the waste, or illegally dispose of the waste. Our report presents options on, how this dilemma may be addressed.

Substantial assistance was received from many organizations and individuals during the course of this study. We would like to express our thanks to our advisory panel, contractors, workshop participants, and reviewers who provided advice and information throughout the course of this study. As with all OTA studies, *OTA* remains solely responsible for the contents of this report.



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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the review panel members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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