

EDITORIAL -

Where there's fire

The transformer explosion and fire at the Maine Yankee nuclear power plant site June 1 was considered a minor incident by Maine Yankee officials, but it does serve as a reminder.

Accidents can happen.

The explosion occurred in a 345-kilovolt Central Maine Power (CMP) switchyard located near the decommissioning power plant, according to spokesman Eric Howes. Neighbors saw and reported the fire. The Wiscasset Fire Department and CMP's hazardous response team responded to the call. Howes said the fire was extinguished "in a matter of minutes," but at press time he could not confirm what caused the transformer to explode.

Apparently the power plant's daily operations were not affected by the fire, but such an event happening during the decommissioning process is a wake up call that, although the plant is shut down, "it ain't over 'til it's over."

Many people in Lincoln County who closely followed events at Maine Yankee during the months of activities and accusations that led to the plant's closure have lost interest in following up on the decommissioning. Not so with one active Maine-based environmental group.

Friends of the Coast Opposing Nuclear Pollution announced this week that tidal areas adjacent to the decommissioning Maine Yankee Atomic Power Station will be the subject of a focused radiological survey. Friends of the Coast and Maine Yankee Atomic have agreed to work together to contract an independent survey of tidal areas which lie just outside of the plant's federally licensed site.

The survey will target identifying and quantifying radioactive pollution deposited in tidal sediment during the Wiscasset reactor's 24-year history of operations. Included in the study will be seaweed, salt-hay, and shellfish. The study will calculate potential radiation doses to a theoretical future resident of the site from the ingestion or use of marine resources from the Maine Yankee property shoreline, the Friends say.

Whoa.

Radiation pollution in sediments, sea-weed and shellfish? It may turn out to be negligible, maybe not. But the slightest possibility of such pollution to the natural environment that is so important to coastal Maine's economy and lifestyle warrants a very close look.

Thank goodness that Friends of the Coast is an active watchdog on behalf of all of us. And working with Maine Yankee, rather than fighting with them, appears to be the productive way to go.

Maine Yankee began decommissioning in 1997 and is scheduled to be complete in 2004. The Maine Yankee Development Project has just been launched. Its mission is to find future uses for the plant's 600-acre site in Wiscasset.

Meanwhile, the radiological survey will be one more step to ensure the safety of the site for the eventual occupiers of the property.

Friday's fire will soon be forgotten.

But for a little while, it reminds us to pay attention.