

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

To the Judges:

Today they are parks, office buildings and hiking trails. But in these places once stood factories and research centers that the U.S. government pressed into service to produce nuclear weapons, two Wall Street Journal reporters discovered in a remarkable investigation. Their yearlong effort resulted in revelations about what happened to the atomic waste from these facilities and a first-of-its-kind online historical database on more than 500 sites.

The government, primarily the Energy Department, has for years assured the public the waste is being cleaned up efficiently and with no harm to anyone. It plans to spend some \$350 billion. But despite all this funding, as John R. Emshwiller and Jeremy Singer-Vine reported, the government hasn't even been able to find the address of some of these facilities. Records on other sites are so spotty no real determination can be made on the next step. And 20 of the sites that were initially declared safe have required a second, and sometimes a third, cleanup over the years.

Thanks to an effort that married 21st-century data analysis with old-fashioned reporting, online readers can now enter their ZIP Code into a database to get a full history of any site near them. The detail of this database—including hundreds of documents, corporate photos of factories and interviews with current property owners, most of whom had no idea of their property's Cold War legacy—makes for sometimes-alarming reading. Not surprisingly, almost a half a million online hits were recorded in the first weeks after our project, called Waste Lands, was published.

In the aftermath, Sen. Robert Casey of Pennsylvania and Rep. Joseph Kennedy of Massachusetts have called on the government to take more action on the cleanup. The Journal articles “helped raise awareness among members of Congress, including me,” wrote Mr. Kennedy. Already, the government has announced that one site in Queens, N.Y., with radioactive waste seeping through sidewalks, featured in one of our articles, may be included in the Superfund program. We expect that more sites will undergo such needed scrutiny, as local officials and property owners alike begin to ask more questions about what material is lurking in walls, the ground and even the groundwater.

Mr. Singer-Vine decided not to give up on one site the government could never seem to locate. After extensive document searches, he found the exact address in Manhattan of a former uranium-processing facility in trendy SoHo. It is testimony to the fine work these reporters have done here, and I am proud to nominate the Waste Lands project for a Pulitzer Prize for national affairs reporting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gerard Baker', with a stylized, cursive script.

Gerard Baker