

OCEANOGRAPHY IN PRACTICE

WE PRACTICE OCEANOGRAPHY in many different ways. The ways vary from research that occurs in national institutes and military organizations to research practiced by scientists in universities and other organizations. Whatever our situation, I am sure we all often think "Is anyone going to use the knowledge gained from our studies?" It has been my observation that most of our knowledge affects governmental decisions very slowly. By slowly I mean years or decades. The slow process is one that goes something like this: field studies alternating with laboratory and theoretical studies, analysis and publication of results, synthesis and re-synthesis of insights, publication of reviews including new insights that are now becoming knowledge, publication in textbooks, use of the textbook by a student, the student graduating, joining a governmental organization, and, finally, the scientist making a decision based on the knowledge gained from the textbook.

Occasionally however something happens that, in its urgency, short circuits the normal process. The nuclear waste problems that are the focus of the Arctic Nuclear Waste Assessment Program are an example of an urgent problem needing quick acquisition of knowledge. The knowledge of the Arctic required to make good decisions was typical of oceanography—multidisciplinary. I hope the scientists that were involved in ANWAP enjoyed the great opportunity to apply their broad knowledge of oceanography to the Arctic nuclear waste issue and to see the information used quickly.

—Larry Atkinson

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