

Half-lives/Afterlives: Labor, Technology, Nature, and the Nuclear Decommissioning Business. Acronym: NUCLEARDECOM.

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Nuclear decommissioning is the final part in the life of nuclear power plants (NPPs) after they permanently cease to operate. Decommissioning strategies, including the management of hazardous materials, largely depend on NPPs reactor technology, operating history, and ecological context and therefore require long-term and site-specific projects, whose complexity far exceeds the commonly debated problem of waste disposal. Treated as a marginal issue until the mid-1970s, nuclear decommissioning became a crucial expert sub-field when first generation NPPs permanently shut down. Since then, it has expanded globally and is destined to grow further as countries like Italy (1991) and Germany (2011) decided to phase out nuclear energy production. Despite the magnitude of the phenomenon and its impactful socio-ecological implications, the Social Sciences and the Humanities have paid scarce attention to nuclear decommissioning, preferring to focus only on its end-tail problem: nuclear waste disposal. Consequently, decommissioning has remained a problem almost exclusively dealt with by technical experts. NUCLEARDECOM aims to reduce that knowledge gap through a dynamic and comprehensive analysis of expert strategies, workers practices, and local communities' responses to decommissioning projects in Western Europe, particularly in Italy and Germany. To this end, it adopts a comparative, interdisciplinary approach consisting of two main components. First, it will document the history of the nuclear decommissioning industry from its inception to the present. Second, it will produce ethnographic evidence of how expert knowledge, working practices, ecological conditions, and community involvement shape site-specific decommissioning projects.