Whatever the reasoning behind it, the effects of Germany’s nuclear u-turn will be felt around the world.

THE ONLY PROBLEM with nuclear power, advocates say, is that it has the word ‘nuclear’ in it. They worry that the emotive power of that one word, just like the word ‘radiation’, is all it takes to provoke Joe Public into a kneejerk ‘I’m agin’ it’ stance. But as you can see on p4, the German version of the famous Smiley sun campaign badge substitutes the question ‘nuclear power?’ for the much cuddlier sounding ‘Atomkraft’.

Germany’s answer to that question has wavered between ‘nein danke’ and ‘jo bitte’ in recent years but it did settle on a long-term plan to become nuclear-free some time ago. Angela Merkel had extended the life of the ageing remaining nuclear plants, but after the events of Fukushima she announced they would all be shut down by 2022. Read Pelle Nerth’s take on the reasons behind the decision and the reaction to it in his dispatch on p4.

It may be more about political expediency than sound engineering but its effects will be felt well beyond Germany. Is it bad news for nuclear power or good news for the nuclear industries in neighbouring countries? The German public say they would pay higher bills for it, but will they accept power cuts? The German Greens love it, but will it just end up increasing Germany’s carbon emissions? Could it even make Germany a leader in alternative technologies? Anne Harris and Mark Venables investigate on p46.

IET members have already started debating these issues in a lively forum on the IET’s website. You can join in at http://bit.ly/GermanNuclearForum. If you’re not yet registered, you can read the posts, but to contribute you’ll need to register through the button in the top right hand corner.

Also in this issue, we focus on the laws of privacy and data protection. The news has been full of celebrity affairs, superinjunctions, hacking, social media, leaks and electronic records. There’s a new legal battlefield between technology companies and law firms: should – or indeed can – the law accommodate new technology? UK information commissioner Christopher Graham and Peter Hustinx, European data protection supervisor, provide their views from p40.

The motion up for debate this issue comes from Cybernetics professor Kevin Warwick: “This house believes robots with human brain cells incorporated are entitled to rights.” Read the arguments for and against on p30 and air your views online at http://bit.ly/robot-rights.

Finally, how many Japanese electronics brands can you name? Plenty, I’m sure. How about Korean? Some, probably. What about Taiwanese? A little harder maybe? We go to Taiwan to find out what makes its technology companies tick (p.80). It’s also the subject of the latest E&T video which you can view through www.EandTmagazine.com/videos. We got exclusive, first-ever filming inside Asus’ cutting edge design centre. So, yes, Asus is one...

by Dickon Ross