

Consolidated “Interim” Storage of High-Level Radioactive Waste-- Prevent a Disaster by Rejecting This Risky Plan

Please vote against any bills that authorize, fund, facilitate or enable consolidated ‘interim’ storage of nuclear reactor waste, mainly irradiated (“spent”) nuclear fuel.

Consolidated “Interim” Storage entails moving and storing high-level radioactive waste, one of the most deadly substances on Earth, from dozens of nuclear sites to one or more centralized locations, presumably until it can be sent to a permanent repository. (The cancelled Yucca Mountain site will not serve this purpose.) A dangerous unprecedented program to haul over a hundred thousand tons of irradiated nuclear fuel thousands of miles across the country, only to move it again, is counterproductive and senseless. It means creating one or more new radioactive sites, in addition to the ones already contaminated.

Thousands of radioactive shipments would travel routinely for 20 to 40 years through nearly 90% of Congressional districts, emitting radiation and creating transportation accident and security risks all the way, putting nearly the whole country at risk. Meanwhile, more waste is still being generated and stored at operating nuclear reactors.

The supposedly “interim” site could become *de facto* permanent even though it would not be designed or characterized for it. Consolidation is the first step to dangerous reprocessing of nuclear waste and plutonium proliferation.

Consolidated “Interim” Storage would **not** facilitate or accelerate the transfer of waste to a permanent repository; in fact it would **delay and take resources** away from efforts to do so. It would cost billions of dollars, money better spent on a realistic scientific effort to develop viable permanent isolation and improved storage systems.

Two companies have applied for licenses from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for consolidated (centralized) “interim” storage of high-level radioactive waste. Both applications are being challenged on legal and technical bases.

- **Waste Control Specialists (WCS)** seeks to bring 40,000 tons of high-level radioactive waste to Andrews County, Texas, from nuclear reactors around the country. WCS and ORANO USA have formed Interim Storage Partners. ORANO is the French government-owned corporation formerly known as Areva, which has been cited for failure to perform on a number of Department of Energy contracts. Their application seeks storage for 40 years but anticipates extensions up to 100 years. The above-ground dry storage casks would be exposed to extreme desert temperatures, storms, lightning, flooding and seismic events. The site is close to the nation’s largest aquifer, the Ogallala, which provides water for eight states including the nation’s bread basket. WCS hopes to be licensed by 2020 and to be ready to open in April of 2022.
- **Holtec International** seeks to store up to 173,000 tons of deadly high-level radioactive waste for 40 years, with possible extensions to 120 years, at a site between Hobbs and Carlsbad, New Mexico. The tops of storage units would be slightly above the ground surface, with waste canisters below ground, at a site with groundwater present at depths of 35’ to 50’ below the surface. This site would have similar risks from extreme temperatures, intense storms and earthquakes. Holtec hopes to begin construction in 2020 and start operating in 2022.

Significant Risks

You can’t see, taste, smell or feel it, but ionizing radiation can lead to birth defects, cancers, reduced immunity and death. Exposure to unshielded high-level radioactive waste is lethal. Accidents involving radiation releases can lead to water contamination and cost taxpayers billions of dollars for cleanup. One radioactive transport accident could destroy lives and livelihoods and impact water supplies, businesses, homes, ranches, agriculture, thriving local industries including the oil industry, and tourism. Rails, trucks, and barges could all be used to

transport this deadly waste.

Over 10,000 shipments would take place, in a process lasting over 20-40 years, risking lives and financial disaster. Rail shipments would involve very heavy loads, weighing as much as 38% more than train tracks are rated to handle. Real-world train accidents have already exceeded the supposed worst-case scenarios used for analyzing risks, including a head-on collision of two trains in West Texas, each going 65 miles per hour. However, the NRC is not requiring updated standards that would meet or exceed the severity of accidents that have already happened, nor is the potential use of drones and armor-piercing weaponry in sabotage events being considered.

Consolidated interim storage plans pose risks for the entire nation, since transportation routes would go through many major U.S. cities, as well as rural areas across the country. Any major commercial rail line (including through the heart of Washington, D.C.) could be used for transport of high-level radioactive waste, and 218 million people live within a half-mile of likely rail lines, putting them at increased risk for exposure, even from routine emissions. Risks could escalate when a train is stopped at a siding or is in a switchyard.

A study by Radioactive Waste Management Associates in 2003 found that 1,370 latent cancer fatalities could result from a rail accident with irradiated fuel. They estimated costs of \$145 - \$270 billion¹ for a severe rail accident.

A single rail car could carry as much plutonium as was in the bomb dropped on Nagasaki. Transportation accidents and potential acts of terrorism could lead to radioactive contamination of land, water and air, and radioactive emissions from routine transport shipments could impact health and safety. These unnecessary risks should be prevented.

The communities and regions targeted with Consolidated “Interim” Storage don’t want it, despite claims to the contrary. There is strong bipartisan opposition.

¹ In today’s dollars, then it would be nearly 40% greater, with inflation.

- Resolutions opposing consolidated interim storage of this waste and its transport through local communities have been passed by Bexar, Dallas, Nueces, El Paso and Midland Counties in Texas, the cities of San Antonio, Midland and Denton, and the Midland Chamber of Commerce. In New Mexico, resolutions have been passed in Bernalillo McKinley and Santa Fe Counties, the cities of Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Lake Arthur, Jal, Gallup, the Church Rock Chapter of the Navajo Nation and the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association.
- A coalition of oil and ranching companies and royalty owners are legally opposing the high-level radioactive plans for Texas and New Mexico, due to risks to the oil industry.
- Nine New Mexico Senators and twenty-one House Members asked the NRC to allow the Legislature time to examine crucial health, safety and economic concerns to the state.
- Together, over 70,000 public comments were submitted to the NRC opposing the two high-level radioactive waste projects. There is no consent to these plans. In fact, there is very strong opposition.

Please act in the interest of people across the nation in saying NO to the dangerous plans to needlessly transport massive amounts of high-level radioactive waste to consolidated “interim” storage sites and to legislation supporting such efforts.