



# Nuclear Energy Information Service

*Illinois' Nuclear Power Watchdog for 25 years*

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## **A Word on Meeting Our Ethical and Moral Environmental Responsibility for Nuclear Waste Disposal – Excellent Reasons to Oppose the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP)**

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PREPARED FOR: State and municipal elected and appointed officials; members of the media

It has come to our attention in the process of speaking out against the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership that some have put forth objections to this opposition on the grounds that we in urban and high-population density parts of Illinois have an obligation not to “dump” the burden created by our radioactive wastes on rural areas in other parts of the country; and that we have a responsibility to the future generations to handle these wastes responsibly.

It would seem that while we are in agreement about our moral and ethical environmental obligations vis a vis radioactive waste disposal, taking such a position as a reason to either support GNEP, or to thwart its debate through delay is a totally inconsistent position with this sentiment of ethical responsibility. Putting forth such a position unfortunately demonstrates either:

- An ignorance of the positions of the environmental community, articulated in detail in information packets made available to local elected and appointed officials;
- A mis-interpretation or mis-understanding of these same materials; or
- A deliberate attempt to disregard them, and use delay as a tactic to thwart meaningful public discussion and debate of the concerns raised in these packets of information

None of these options speaks well for either the ethical/moral positions we share; or for the competence of the individuals advocating such delay and prevention of debate.

We will attempt to clarify these positions now, to facilitate both a correct understanding and interpretation of the positions of the environmental community; and, to provide an opportunity to continue democratic debate of these ideas in a public forum.

**Position put forth by GNEP supporters: *We have a moral/ethical obligation to not dump our problem on rural areas; and to take responsibility for our own radioactive waste problems.***

### **REBUTTAL 1. – be consistent:**

- Since 2002 the environmental community has embraced the notions express in this position by advocating the temporary storage of irradiated (a.k.a. – “spent”) reactor fuel in security-enhanced bunkers *onsite* at the place of origin (i.e., the reactors). This position is titled “HOSS” – for “hardened on-site storage.” A position paper on HOSS is available online ([www.neis.org](http://www.neis.org)); and was made available in packets and at all the GNEP public meetings in which environmental groups participated. The position makes use of a technology the NRC has said can safely store these wastes onsite for up to 100 years; and for which the nuclear industry itself advocated strongly throughout the 1990s. Ultimately, their wish was granted by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). Currently, such wastes are

stored using dry-casks at the Dresden and Quad Cities reactor sites in Illinois. In the activist version of HOSS these canisters are greatly reinforced and sited in ways that are much more terrorist and accident resistant than what is being utilized at these sites today, or promoted by the nuclear industry.

The nuclear industry opposes the HOSS plan. To date the NRC and the DOE have failed to act on this alternative proposal. These are the agencies which are now pushing in favor of GNEP. We will let the reader decide who is acting in a moral and ethical manner based on this history.

- If one is really genuine about not wanting to dump these radioactive wastes for which we must accept responsibility onto rural communities, then the correct position should *also* be to endorse a resolution *against* the completion of the demonstrably faulty and environmentally questionable Yucca Mt. facility, currently being characterized in Nevada by the Dept. of Energy. The rural communities and Native American tribes of Nevada located around the Mountain have vociferously opposed this facility; and are fighting in court to protect their homelands. If this body is to be consistent, we call for an immediate resolution against the completion of Yucca Mt. as well.
- If one is really genuine about not wanting to dump responsibility for these wastes on future generations, then a resolution calling for the cessation and complete phase out of nuclear power is in order. Nothing short of that will achieve this sensitive objective.

#### **REBUTTAL 2. -- be accurate:**

- The recommended use of HOSS as an alternative to GNEP is totally compatible with the fairness issue – that *Illinois* takes care of *its* waste, and no one else's.
- Permitting GNEP to be implemented opens up the possibility for *other* states to dump its wastes in Illinois at points in the future currently unforeseen. This possibility nearly came to fruition in Congressional legislation in late 2006, which fortunately was defeated. Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich and 16 other governors signed a letter to Congress opposing such a proposed scheme, which would have bestowed upon DOE such pre-emptive powers to create regional irradiated fuel facilities as they saw fit – over the objections of states. Illinois would in all likelihood have been a logical candidate to accept the irradiated fuel for the Great Lakes Basin, the Midwest, or both.
- Although DOE and GE have stated that accepting wastes from outside Illinois is not the “intention”, neither has been willing to commit to a legally binding, unalterable written contract to guarantee that this will not happen sometime in the future. Caveat emptor. Or, as an old medical practitioner adage states, “If it isn't in writing, it never happened!”

#### **REBUTTAL 3. -- be realistic:**

- Areas of high-population density – such as those in the growing suburban areas south and west of Chicago -- simply are NOT the best choice to site nuclear facilities of most if any kind, let alone those proposed under GNEP. This point was emphatically hammered home during the serious 1999 accident at the Tokaimura fuel manufacture facility in Japan, where three workers died, and 300,000 people surrounding the facility were urged to stay indoors – and still may have been irradiated in their homes by the neutron flux produced during the accident.
- It is not demonstrating fairness to the emergency response workers in surrounding communities to ask them to accept the responsibility to respond to potential accidents, without guaranteeing that the necessary equipment and training is first in place.
- It is not acting responsibly to unleash irradiated fuel from any source – in or out of Illinois -- on Illinois roads, rail routes, and potentially waterways without necessary infrastructure improvements along these

transport corridors. Such improvements were advocated in legislation introduced in Congress in 2002 by Sen. Richard Durbin, but which were defeated and not implemented to this day. Rule of thumb – nothing moves without adequate improvements.

- It is not fair to the people living and working in and along those transportation corridors whose homes and economic livelihoods are tied to those corridors to accept the risk that they may lose either or both, just so the DOE and nuclear industry can get their way without considering viable alternatives like HOSS.
- In 2003 the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) pledged to conduct full-scale testing on potential shipping casks for transporting irradiated fuel and high-level wastes. They have not conducted such tests to this date. It is not *rational* to accept the pledges and promises of federal or private entities and agencies which have a demonstrated track record of consistently failing to keep their word and honor their obligations to the public. Local elected officials have a duty and obligation to protect their constituents from further such abuse.