

YUCCA MT. – A *REAL* NUCLEAR WASTE

To the Editors:

While seemingly well-intended, the recent drumbeat demanding quick action to reactivate the flawed Yucca Mt. Nevada site to serve as the nation's permanent disposal repository for high-level radioactive wastes (HLRW) is naïve and ill-informed, ignoring the complex realities surrounding HLRW storage and disposal.

While moving HLRW is laudable and ultimately necessary, sending it to a flawed site destined to leak, or to redundant temporary storage sites away from reactors is simply irresponsible management, environmentally threatening, and prohibitively costly compared to existing, viable alternatives. It only benefits nuclear utilities wishing to make more wastes, and who are getting a little "constipated."

Proponents crying "Reid/Obama politics" totally distort the history of Yucca Mt.'s selection: it was picked by politics first, then subsequently "characterized" afterwards, turning the notion of science completely on its head. Eight other sites were to have been investigated, but were removed from consideration by politics and a Congress that then *prohibited* the DOE from examining other sites.

Yucca's desert remoteness does not mean no one lives there. It is *not* "in nobody's backyard." By treaty it sits on Western Shoshone land, and they contest and oppose the Yucca Mt. site, as do the *majority* of Nevadans.

Proponents derisively label Nevada's opposition to Yucca Mt. as "NIMBY-ism;" yet Nevadans derived no benefit from nuclear power nor the creation of HLRW, but are being forced to accept the liabilities. People in other states got the nuclear benefits, but now don't want *their backyards* sullied by HLRW, instead demanding folks elsewhere take the risks. Who's the real NIMBY?

Proponents place selectively misguided and undeserved confidence in the performance and conclusions of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), an agency referred to by Washington Congressional staffers as a lapdog agency, captive of the industry it is charged to regulate.

Proponents cherry-pick a 2014 NRC report alleging Yucca is "capable of safely isolating used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste for the 1-million-year period specified in the regulations." But they conveniently ignore another 2014 NRC report stating, "spent fuel generated in any reactor can be stored safely and without significant environmental impacts for at least 60 years beyond the licensed life for operation of that reactor," either in the spent fuel pools or in "dry casks" -- indicating there is no urgent, compelling environmental reason to fast-track a flawed Yucca Mt.site.

Who says the Yucca site is flawed? Among *many* others, Alison Macfarlane, professional geologist and former Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairwoman, whose presentation at the

2008 Deane Conference at Lake Forest College indicated that Yucca Mt. failed two of four international IAEA siting criteria for the safe isolation of HLRW.

Recall – we lack Starship Enterprise transporter technology. While it is tempting to urge quick removal of HLRW away from reactors, the reality is that prematurely placing thousands of tons of HLRW on our crumbling roads and rails, and possibly our waterways without *first* greatly improving that infrastructure would be more dangerous and irresponsible. If these wastes represent a hazard sitting still at guarded reactor sites, they represent an even greater hazard at 40-60 mph on our roads and rails, as the March 15th Lake Forest, IL rail derailment carrying molten sulfur, and the June 30th oil-train spill in Plainfield, IL amply demonstrate. Further, a March 9, 2017 report by The American Society of Civil Engineers gives Illinois “D” and “D-“ ratings for its roads and rail lines, respectively – both *higher* than the national average!

What should be done? Since HLRW represents a clear hazard lacking a responsible disposal site for the foreseeable future, local communities hosting *de facto* HLRW dumps should be given maximum interim protection by storing the HLRW in enhanced “hardened onsite storage” (HOSS) facilities at reactor sites; and receive compensation for the economic damage that the presence of HLRW has on their communities. This buys time to conduct a responsible, science-based investigation to identify a safe and appropriate final disposal facility.

We'll only get one chance to select a safe site. The nation needs an excellent HLRW disposal RE-pository, not a flawed SUP-pository benefitting only the nuclear industry. Impulsively selecting a Yucca Mt. site destined to fail is the wrong choice.

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NEIS was founded in 1981 to provide the public with credible information on nuclear power, waste, and radiation hazards; and information about the viable energy alternatives to nuclear power. NEIS staff have served previously on the IL Dept. of Nuclear Safety's Citizen Advisory Group on Low-Level Radioactive Waste; and as invited presenters to both President Obama's 2011 Blue Ribbon Commission on the Future of Nuclear Power; and in 2016 at the U.S. DOE's scoping process for the Consent Based Siting of Radioactive Wastes in Chicago, IL.

Submitted by:
David A. Kraft, Director
Nuclear Energy Information Service (NEIS)
neis@neis.org
(773)342-7650