

For Immediate Release: May 7, 2020

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Nuclear Regulatory Commission Ignores Risks; Citizens Seek to Protect Public Health from Nation's Dangerous Radioactive Waste

Public meetings should be held in major Texas cities along transport routes – and only after the COVID-19 crisis is over.

(Austin, TX) “The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is ignoring the many serious health and safety risks of hauling deadly nuclear reactor waste across the country and dumping it on Texas,” said Karen Hadden, executive director of SEED Coalition.

The agency has completed a draft study of environmental impacts for a nuclear waste dump proposed for Andrews County, Texas by Interim Storage Partners, an entity that includes Waste Control Specialists (WCS) and its partner, Orano USA. The NRC’s preliminary recommendation is that the NRC should issue this license.

*NRC Press release: <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/news/2020/20-025.pdf>

*Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the WCS/ ISP high-level radioactive waste storage proposal for Texas: <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML2012/ML20122A220.pdf>

Over 46,000 comments were previously received by the NRC regarding this application, raising concerns about transportation, security, repackaging leaking containers, water contamination risks and health impacts. “The NRC is more interested in ramming this waste dump through than in protecting citizens or property that could be impacted,” said Hadden. “It’s time to speak up once again and tell the NRC not to mess with Texas.”

A 120-day comment period is anticipated, but there is no guarantee that it will be safe to hold public meetings yet during this time. “Public meetings should not be held until after coronavirus risks are really over,” said Adrian Shelly, Director of Public Citizen’s Texas Office. “The NRC should host meetings in major cities through which transportation of dangerous nuclear waste would occur, such as Dallas/ Ft. Worth, San Antonio, Houston, Midland and El Paso in Texas. The NRC previously held only one meeting in Texas, in the city of Andrews, and one in New Mexico, making it nearly impossible for many Texans to attend and participate.”

Legal opposition is underway. SEED Coalition, Sierra Club and Fasken Oil and Ranch have standing in the case, which has been heard by Atomic Safety and Licensing Board judges, and is now on appeal to the NRC Commissioners, who largely swept similar health and safety concerns under the rug in their review of a similar facility proposed for nearby New Mexico.

“Our land is not the nation’s dumping ground for dangerous high-level radioactive waste, with its risks for cancer, birth defects and deaths. Those who created the waste should take responsibility for it. Our sacred land is not their pay toilet,” said Rose Gardner, who lives in

Eunice, near the proposed radioactive waste storage site, and co-chairs Alliance for Environmental Strategies, the local group opposing the dangerous plan. “We ask people from Texas and around the country to support us in halting the plan, which not only creates risks locally, but also nationwide along transport routes. Our region already has radioactive poisons. We don’t want any more. We do not consent to taking high-level radioactive waste!”

The nuclear waste consists of highly irradiated fuel rods that have been inside an operating nuclear reactor. Most of the original uranium, along with plutonium, cesium and strontium are still present and the irradiated rods are much more radioactive than the original fuel. Exposure to unshielded spent fuel rods is lethal. Lesser exposures cause cancers, genetic damage and birth defects. The EPA has set exposure standards that go far into the future, since radioactive wastes will remain dangerous for up to 1 million years. Yucca Mountain was supposed to isolate high-level radioactive waste for a million years, but was found to be inadequate.

The NRC will accept email comments at: WCS_CISF_EIS@nrc.gov. The Docket ID, NRC-2016-0231, should be included in the subject line of comments.

Comments can also be submitted at <http://www.regulations.gov> or sent by mail to: Office of Administration, Mail Stop: TWFN-7-A60M, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001, ATTN: Program Management, Announcements and Editing Staff.

Websites with high-level radioactive waste information include: www.NoNuclearWaste.org, www.nirs.org, <http://www.beyondnuclear.org>.

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