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Radioactive Waste Bill Threatens Texas and New Mexico; Poses Nationwide Risks from Dangerous Unnecessary Transport

Citizens Oppose HR 3053 - Nuclear Waste Policy Act Amendments of 2017

AUSTIN, TX, -- Texas and New Mexico are targeted as ground zero for the nation’s high-level radioactive waste, the most deadly of all radioactive materials. Dallas, Bexar, Midland and Nueces County Commissions in Texas and the cities of San Antonio and Lake Arthur, New Mexico studied the issue and passed resolutions opposing transport of high-level radioactive waste through their communities. But Congress will soon debate a bill that would smooth the path for consolidated interim storage by removing an existing hurdle in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

The NRC could then license consolidated interim storage facilities proposed for Texas and New Mexico. An unprecedented mass movement of high-level radioactive waste across the nation could occur, with over 10,000 train shipments, occurring over a period of 24 years. A previous DOE study found that at least one train accident could be expected if transport was mainly by train. A 42-square mile area could be contaminated from a small radioactive release, and remediation costs could range from \$620 million in a rural area up to \$9.5 billion for a single square mile in a major city.

“Public health and safety should be prioritized,” said Dallas County Commissioner Dr. Theresa Daniel, who sponsored the resolution passed by Dallas County. “Congress should enact protections for communities along potential transport routes, not speed progress toward consolidated interim storage in Texas and New Mexico. Shimkus’ H.R. 3053 should be amended to require that transport routes be designated and public hearings be held before any radioactive waste facility can be licensed. People have a right to know if they would be at risk.”

“Moving this deadly waste simply to store it all in one place creates unnecessary risks from accidents, leaks and terrorism,” said Tom “Smitty” Smith, Senior Advocate for Public Citizen’s Texas office. “There’s no need to move it right now and it’s less dangerous to secure it at reactor sites. Radioactive waste should only be moved once, when a permanent repository with the right location and robust storage systems is available, in order to isolate the waste for millions of years. Storing dangerous radioactive waste for decades in a seismically active region can only lead to disaster. Millions of people could be impacted by leaks or an accident if the nation’s largest aquifer, the Ogallala, became contaminated.”

“Trains carrying high-level radioactive waste from reactors around the country should not come through our communities or move alongside major military bases in San Antonio, especially since each rail car would carry as much plutonium as was in the bomb dropped on Nagasaki,” said Bexar County Commissioner Tommy Calvert, Jr., who sponsored the resolution passed there. “I hope our Texas Congressional delegation will oppose H.R. 3053, the bill that removes existing protections in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act and could lead to dangerous nuclear reactor waste from the whole country being dumped here. We say “Don’t Mess With Texas.”

“We received none of the electricity produced by nuclear reactors in California, Chicago or New York, and had no economic benefit from them,” said Elizabeth Padilla, a concerned mother in Andrews County. “It is a massive injustice to bring in the most deadly radioactive waste from the entire country and dump it in our backyard. They generated the waste. They should take responsibility for storing it where it was generated, and not dump it on communities that don’t have the millions of dollars needed to fight back.”

“My community does not want dangerous radioactive waste, despite claims made by nuclear lobbyists and politicians who see us as their dumping ground,” said Rose Gardner who has been fighting low-level radioactive waste in her community for years. “Two companies now want to bring in the deadliest of all radioactive waste, from around the entire country, store it in our backyard and keep it there for decades. We don’t want it and we don’t consent to being dumped on. We live here. We have children. And we’re not the sacrifice zone for wealthier communities who should keep their own waste.” Gardner lives in Eunice, New Mexico, 5 miles west of the proposed WCS radioactive waste storage site, and southeast of the proposed Holtec / Eddy Lea Energy Alliance site, proposed for midway between Carlsbad and Hobbs, NM.

“For decades, the large majority of New Mexicans have repeatedly said NO to commercial spent fuel when it was proposed by the Department of Energy for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) and when utilities proposed a Holtec-type dump on Mescalero Apache land. Those proposals were defeated. The Holtec site will also stopped,” said Don Hancock, Nuclear Waste Program Director at Southwest Research and Information Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

“The Navajo Nation prohibits transport of radioactive materials through Diné Bideyah—our indigenous lands—but doesn’t have jurisdiction over federal and state highways or railways,” said Leona Morgan of Diné No Nukes, an organization working to address nuclear colonialism. “In addition to the thousands of abandoned uranium mines in the Southwest, having high-level radioactive waste transported through and dumped here would add to the radioactive risks people suffer already.”

What can be done?

“Homeowners’ insurance policies generally don’t cover nuclear accidents and no one wants their children accidentally exposed to radiation that can cause cancer, genetic damage or death,” said Karen Hadden, Executive Director of Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) Coalition. “We call on our Congressional leaders to stop the insane path toward dumping the nation’s radioactive waste on Texas and New Mexico. We strongly oppose Shimkus’ bill. At minimum, it should be amended to require that transportation routes be designated before any consolidated interim storage site for deadly radioactive waste can be licensed. People have a right to know if they’re at risk for shipments of radioactive waste coming through their neighborhoods.”

Expected routes to Yucca Mountain were previously developed. Routes to Texas and New Mexico consolidated interim storage sites could be similar, but have not been designated.

Please visit:

<https://www.nirs.org/campaigns/dont-waste-america/>

- more information about HR 3053 and consolidated interim storage

https://www.nirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Cities_Affected.pdf

(With 20 of the major cities high-level radioactive waste could travel through)
