

For Immediate Release

April 10, 2018

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[Photos here: Dropbox photos](#). *Entrevistas disponible en Español*

Residents Seek to Protect New Mexico from Nation's Most Dangerous Radioactive Waste

Over 10,000 Rail Cars of Radioactive Waste – a train wreck waiting to happen

Albuquerque, N.M.—Activists inflated a mock radioactive waste canister at a news conference today to point out how risky the shipment and storage of the nation's most radioactive nuclear reactor wastes is to New Mexico. Holtec International has a controversial plan to store up to 100,000 tons of the nation's most dangerous nuclear reactor waste, for as long as 120 years at a site between Hobbs and Carlsbad.

Over 10,000 rail cars of high-level radioactive waste will be dumped on New Mexico if we don't stop this project. Opponents are concerned about the health, safety, transportation, financial, and environmental justice aspects of storing high-level radioactive waste, that would impact thousands of generations to come.

Holtec's license application to build and operate a storage facility in Lea County, New Mexico, has been accepted as complete by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The agency has announced its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on Holtec's proposal and will take written comments and hold three public meetings in Roswell, Hobbs and Carlsbad. At each location, a court reporter will be available to record comments. In New Mexico, Spanish-speaking staff will assist with translation. Public comments will be accepted until May 29.

“Starting with uranium mining and milling ... to modern weapons production, uranium enrichment, and storage of low-level and transuranic wastes, New Mexico has been targeted as a national sacrifice zone for too long,” said **Leona Morgan, Diné activist and co-founder of Nuclear Issues Study Group**. “New Mexico is the birthplace of nuclear colonialism. We have been impacted by just about every step in the nuclear fuel chain! We did not generate this waste from nuclear reactors that is intended to come here. So why should we take it? As a state with many indigenous nations and people of color, and being at the tail end of several measures of quality of life, it is environmental racism at its core to keep dumping on New Mexico. And it's time to stop!”

“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 Pat Cardona, speaking on behalf of **Rose Gardner, founder of Alliance for Environmental Strategies** a community group based in Southeast New Mexico opposing the radioactive-waste proposal. “We ask people from

New Mexico and around the country to support us in halting this dangerous plan, which not only creates risks for us at ground zero, but creates risks along transport routes nationwide. New Mexico already has more than our fair share of radioactive poisons. We don't want any more! We do not consent to taking high-level radioactive waste!"

There is growing opposition to radioactive waste storage throughout New Mexico. Nine New Mexico Senators and 21 state representatives were concerned enough about the proposal that they recently wrote a letter asking the NRC to give the state time to explore health, safety, financial, and transportation risks to the state of New Mexico.

As one of the New Mexican representatives who signed the letter to NRC, **Rep. Stephanie Garcia Richard** states, "It will be imperative for the state legislature, its oversight committees and the public to have an opportunity to have all of their safety concerns and questions properly acknowledged, addressed, and answered. These concerns are not limited to: canister design, proposed transportation routes, and planned response to catastrophic events."

"To this end, a number of legislators had written to the NRC, asking for the scoping period to be extended so that the matter could be considered when the state legislature was in session during the winter of 2019. Because that request has been denied, me and many of my colleagues are now asking that the NRC appear before the appropriate interim committee to have safety concerns about the proposed storage siting addressed. Today we call on all New Mexicans to continue to pressure Holtec and the NRC to take our concerns seriously. Stay active. Stay involved; and together, we will continue to ensure that all safety issues are answered," said Rep. Garcia Richard.

According to the application, high-level radioactive waste could end up being stored for up to 120 years, longer than New Mexico has existed as a state. The federal government has promised and failed for more than 35 years to develop a permanent safe storage or disposal for high-level reactor wastes.

"What happens if the federal government breaks its promise to move this waste away or won't pay to clean it up?" asked **Sister Marlene Perrotte, speaking on behalf of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light**. "This is an ethical and moral concern that affects communities and God's creation. Most existing low-level radioactive waste sites in the country have leaked and Congress has failed to appropriate enough money to clean them up. Sixty-three faith leaders in New Mexico have now signed onto a letter expressing questions and concerns about health, safety, and transportation risks of importing and storing high-level radioactive waste. As faith leaders, we want to ensure a safe future for generations to come."

The waste would consist of irradiated fuel rods that have been inside a nuclear power reactor. These fuel rods still contain most of the original uranium, along with plutonium, cesium and strontium. In close proximity, radiation exposure from casks is possible during transport. Direct exposure to unshielded fuel rods is lethal. In just the last three years in New Mexico, there have been five train derailments.

"Transportation of radioactive waste is a train wreck waiting to happen," said **Eileen Shaughnessy, co-founder of Albuquerque-based Nuclear Issues Study Group**. "More than 10,000 rail cars would haul this irradiated waste, rumbling on rails throughout the country

and near major cities in New Mexico, in a process that would take 20 years or more. Likely rail routes would run along I-40, I-25, and from Belen to Carlsbad. While the waste would not be in bomb form, each rail car would carry more deadly plutonium than in the bomb dropped on Nagasaki.”

Shaughnessy continues, “Studies should be done regarding the risks to engineers and people along rail lines in New Mexico and throughout the country. The NRC admits that some radiation would routinely escape the transport casks. What impacts would there be to engineers, rail workers and community members?”

“Holtec’s proposal is that the U.S. Department of Energy will pay for the transportation costs. But that’s not allowed by federal law, which prohibits DOE from paying for transportation to a private storage site, like Holtec’s,” said **Don Hancock, Director of the Nuclear Waste Program at Southwest Research and Information Center.**

The NRC has scheduled the first public scoping meeting at its Rockville headquarters, which can be accessed via webinar. The subsequent three will be in New Mexico. Each is an opportunity to learn more about the proposal and to submit public comments. “Public comments can and do make a difference,” said Hancock.

NRC has set three public scoping meetings and one open house as follows: April 25 at the NRC Headquarters in Rockville, Maryland; April 30 in Roswell, NM (open house); May 1 in Hobbs, NM; and May 3 in Carlsbad, NM.

NRC Meeting Dates & Locations:

Meeting/Open House	Date	Time	Location
Public Scoping Meeting and Webinar	April 25, 2018	7:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m. (EDT)	Rockville, Maryland, NRC Headquarters, Address: 11555 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852
Open House	April 30, 2018	4:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m. (MDT) ...	Roswell, New Mexico, Address: Eastern New Mexico University—Roswell, Campus Union Building, Multi-Purpose Room 110, 48 University Blvd., Roswell, NM 88130
Public Scoping Meeting	May 1, 2018	7:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m. (MDT)	Hobbs, New Mexico, Address: Lea County Event Center, 5101 N. Lovington Highway, Hobbs, NM 88240
Public Scoping Meeting	May 3, 2018	7:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m. (MDT)	Carlsbad, New Mexico, Address: Eddy County Fire Service, 1400 Commerce Street, Carlsbad, NM 88220.

Comments can be submitted in person at above public meetings or online at: <https://www.regulations.gov/comment?D=NRC-2018-0052-0001>

Comments can also be submitted by mail, with “RE: Docket ID NRC-2018-0052”, to: May Ma, Office of Administration, Mail Stop: TWFN–7– A60M, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555– 0001.

- The Holtec HI-STORE Consolidated Interim Storage Facility application is online: <https://www.nrc.gov/waste/spent-fuel-storage/cis/hi/hi-app-docs.html>

- The NRC meetings will focus on comments regarding the Environmental Report, which will be used to develop an Environmental Impact Statement. The latest version is Rev. 1.
- The Federal Register Notice for March 30, 2018 describes the scoping process:
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/30/2018-06398/holtec-international-hi-store-consolidated-interim-storage-facility-project>

Next Cask Tour Stops

- Albuquerque, Tuesday, April 10 at 11:45 am
- Carlsbad, Wednesday, April 11 at 10 a.m.
- Hobbs, Wednesday, April 11 at 2 p.m.
- Roswell, Thursday, April 12 at 10 a.m.
- Artesia, Thursday, April 12, at 2 p.m.

Details and additional Cask Tour dates will be posted online at:

www.facebook.com/HaltHoltec

Websites with more information:

www.NoNuclearWaste.org

http://www.sric.org/nuclear/nwp_docs.php

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