



NUCLEAR INFORMATION AND RESOURCE SERVICE

6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 340, Takoma Park, MD 20912
301-270-NIRS (301-270-6477); Fax: 301-270-4291
nirsnet@nirs.org; www.nirs.org

NEWS FROM NIRS

Tuesday August 26, 2014

Contact: Diane D'Arrigo, 301-270-6477, dianed@nirs.org
Mary Olson 828-252-8409, maryo@nirs.org

Statement of Nuclear Information and Resource Service

on the

Nuclear Regulatory Commission Vote on Radioactive Waste from Nuclear Power: No Need to Consider Local Environmental Threats of Mounting Radioactive Waste Stockpiles When Licensing More Waste Production

Washington, DC - A fast-tracked vote by the four Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Commissioners will allow resumption of licensing and relicensing of nuclear power reactors which make long-lasting deadly radioactive waste, reaffirming their denial that nuclear waste threatens this and all future generations. Today's bid is to satisfy a federal court order two years ago which struck down the "Waste Confidence Rule," a key regulation that streamlined the licensing process for nuclear power reactors by establishing the NRC's "confidence" that its regulations would keep the waste "safe" until that day when it would be removed. The rule has formed the underpinning for all nuclear licensing in the US, since this highly concentrated and deadly radioactive waste is generated solely by nuclear power.

"This waste is lethal for centuries and causes cancer, infertility, birth defects and other harms to members of the public, as well as every other life form exposed," said Mary Olson, Southeast Regional Coordinator for NIRS.

In 2012, a federal three-judge panel (DC appeals court) asserted that NRC had no basis for "confidence" since there is, in fact, no plan for how to manage or isolate the most concentrated radioactive wastes ever produced. "This ray of reality ripped a big hole in the NRC's authority to grant new nuclear licenses or extend old ones," said Diane D'Arrigo, Radioactive Waste Project Director at NIRS. Commercial nuclear licensing in the USA has been frozen since June 2012, with NRC declaring a temporary licensing moratorium rather than conducting the site-specific environmental reviews that would be required without the untenable Waste Confidence policy.

"Now the Commission, much like the "Emperor" who has realized it is without clothing, has been rushing around to find cover. Unfortunately the vote today is for a fig leaf instead of a proper set of new clothing," continued D'Arrigo.

Since 2012 NRC has fast-tracked an effort to recover its streamlined licensing authority by instituting a new "Waste Confidence" policy. Originally, NRC staff indicated it would take more time, as much as 7 years to truly

Nuclear Information and Resource Service/World Information Service on Energy-Amsterdam

Main offices: Washington, DC and Amsterdam, Netherlands

Affiliate offices: Asheville, NC; Rosario, Argentina; Linz, Austria; Brno, Czech Republic; Hiroshima, Japan;
Kaliningrad, Russia; Bratislava, Slovakia;

Stockholm, Sweden; Rivne, Ukraine; WISE-Uranium: Arnsdorf, Germany

evaluate the dangers of waste storage. A quicker way was found: use all the old assumptions, produce a generic analysis and allow the nuclear waste generators to skip any local, specific analysis of risks and impacts at nuclear power reactor sites. NRC has simply removed the word “confidence” and now writes about “continued storage” while insisting there is no significant environmental impact from this waste “For two years we had hoped that logic would prevail: but no such luck. An irrational, industry-dominated NRC has affirmed carte blanche to dirty energy corporations: ‘go ahead, produce as much highly radioactive waste as you want; tell us it is safe and we, the NRC, will believe you.’ This decision today makes it impossible for NRC to claim that it is independent,” said Tim Judson, Executive Director of NIRS. “We agree with grassroots activists in nuclear power communities who have decided that this is a Con Job. NRC has done nothing to increase our confidence in its performance as a regulator of safety.”

Nuclear promoters are calling for a shell-game approach of moving the waste to a “temporary” site to reduce inventories at reactor sites and to transfer ownership and responsibility to the federal taxpayers. Such consolidated storage would trigger the largest nuclear shipping campaign in history, resulting in significant radiation exposures to the public during transport with and without the inevitable accidents. Communities targeted for consolidated storage are predictably low-income and disproportionately people of color communities.

“There is no reality-based plan for how to prevent the release of this enormous inventory of man-made radioactivity. Disasters like Chernobyl and Fukushima Daiichi have spread radioactivity around the globe, but they pale in comparison to the potential consequences of an accident or act of war targeting nuclear waste storage facilities. NRC is continuing its policy of putting the corporate cart before radioactive horse, despite the ongoing degradation of facilities, containers, and safety protocols combined with lack of credible programs to ensure isolation of this waste virtually forever. This waste poses a threat to life on Earth for longer than human beings have existed,” said Mary Olson, NIRS Southeast.

Fifty years ago it was thought a hole in the ground would suffice – now we know that is not enough. Every proposed permanent dumpsite has been seriously flawed. The formerly proposed nuclear dump at Yucca Mountain would leak and much faster than would meet even lax safety standards. Many have recently promoted the theoretical concept of expanding the mission for WIPP (the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant) nuclear weapons waste deep geological repository in New Mexico to take civilian highly radioactive wastes; this proposal is clearly technically flawed and, given the recent fire and leaks at site, make it questionable it can even continue for that waste let alone adding more. We are very lucky that this much greater burden of radioactive waste has not been buried there.

The 2012 Federal court ruling was in a case brought by Attorneys General of NY, VT, CT, NJ and public interest attorneys representing organizations with members in impacted communities, including Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Hudson Riverkeeper and others. We salute our allies who brought this legal action and sincerely hope that the federal bench is watching this charade and will hear any future challenge of this matter.

end

Nuclear Information and Resource Service/World Information Service on Energy-Amsterdam
Main offices: Washington, DC and Amsterdam, Netherlands
Affiliate offices: Asheville, NC; Rosario, Argentina; Linz, Austria; Brno, Czech Republic; Hiroshima, Japan;
Kaliningrad, Russia; Bratislava, Slovakia;
Stockholm, Sweden; Rivne, Ukraine; WISE-Uranium: Arnsdorf, Germany