

## PRESS RELEASE

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### “NO Confidence in NRC’s ‘Waste Confidence’!” - Safe Energy Advocates Declare

**CHICAGO**—Safe energy advocates from numerous organizations around the Great Lakes Basin converged on Oak Brook, Illinois to deliver a message to the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC): **“We have NO confidence in NRC’s ‘Waste Confidence’ rule!”**

The NRC has scheduled a meeting to take public comment on its draft generic environmental impact statement (DGEIS) dealing with the storage of high-level radioactive waste (HLRW) in the form of spent reactor fuel rods currently stored at over 70 sites nationwide. The Chicago meeting is one of a series of 12 being held around the country, although NRC initially left Chicago off its list, and had to be forced into scheduling a session in Illinois – the state with the most reactors and most HLRW.

The NRC has been forced by a 2012 federal court ruling to justify with hard data, not just verbal assurances as was historically the case, that all the radioactive wastes ever generated by all U.S. reactors can be safely stored onsite at these reactors – indefinitely, if necessary. If NRC cannot do this, they will lose their authority to give out operating licenses to new reactors, or re-license old reactors, such as the four Exelon reactors applying for license extension at Byron and Braidwood in Illinois.

“Fifty years into the Nuclear Age, and as yet no place to permanently dispose of the more than 70,000 tons of spent reactor fuel, 9,000+ tons in Illinois alone,” notes **Dave Kraft, Director of Nuclear Energy Information Service (NEIS)**, an Illinois nuclear watchdog organization. “The nuclear industry has no bathroom, so to speak; yet, NRC continues to allow them to keep excreting more waste with nothing more than the verbal assurances of its Waste Confidence Rule to claim the public is protected. Those days of ‘fairly dust safety’ are over.”

“The NRC it must abandon its so-called “Waste Confidence” policy and stop licensing nuclear reactors when there is no proven solution to the waste problem – except to stop making it,” maintains **Maureen Headington of Stand Up, Save Lives!** of Burr Ridge, Illinois.

This sentiment is echoed both local and nationally:

“The Sierra Club is dedicated to creating a sustainable future for all mankind that is without dependence on fossil and nuclear fuels...The problem of what to do with radioactive waste - to pick the "safest of the unsafe" alternatives - will be with us for all time. We only get one chance to get it right,” warns **Linda Lewison** of the newly formed **Sierra Club Illinois Nuclear Free Committee**. “We do not have confidence in the NRC. How can they continue to license and relicense nuclear reactors with no plan in place for a permanent geological repository?...We don't buy this lack of a plan.”

The NRC must develop a new and complete Generic Environmental Impact Statement to the Court’s satisfaction if it is to regain its ability to license nuclear reactors. Part of the GEIS process is to gather public comment on the proposed rule through public meetings like the one in Oak Brook. Not everyone is convinced that NRC is addressing the most important issues in its proposed GEIS:

“...NRC has not lived up to its duty to the American people in regards to radioactive nuclear waste. For too long the government has been kicking the can down the road about where to put the tons of nuclear waste that have been piling up at America's nuclear power plants,” says **Dr. Lora Chamberlain of Nuclear Free Illinois**. “We want the NRC to stop the making of this dangerous waste and find a permanent solution... Our children deserve a safe nuclear free future.”

NRC has been criticized not only for the lack of hard data to back up its claims for safe storage of the spent fuel, but for the lackadaisical attitude it has displayed towards even simple regulation:

“While reviewing the [DGEIS] for comment, the term “adequate” repeatedly appears regarding the steps currently used to store toxic nuclear waste. Whenever I hear the term used by NRC staff... I cringe,” states **Bette Pierman of Michigan Safe Energy Future** in South haven, Michigan. “I am not sure how the use of this term is supposed to be reassuring to the public since it means “good enough.” The connotation connected with “good enough” is mediocre. So, I ask you, how safe would you feel with an “adequate” pilot on a turbulent transcontinental flight? Or, how quickly would you employ an “adequate” heart surgeon if you required surgery? Yet, [NRC] throws the word “adequate” around to the public like that is supposed to reassure us about the safety of ...what you propose as the generic treatment of waste storage for a number of years far into the future. This member of the public does not share your confidence!”

The consequences of the GEIS and the Court ruling could have near-term implications beyond reactor licensing. Without the existence of a permanent, deep-geological disposal facility in which to dispose of the spent-fuel, it has been stockpiling at existing reactor sites around the country, stored in the required “wet pools,” or in outdoor, air-cooled “dry-casks.”

The past and recent closure of many reactors has resulted in former reactor sites becoming de facto waste dumpsites. Proposed Federal legislation (S.1240) gives priority to move this waste to “centralized interim storage” (CIS) facilities, for alleged temporary storage. However, this plan is opposed by many safe-energy groups around the country – who refer to CIS as “parking lot dumps” -- as unsafe and unnecessary. Further, what is largely unknown to the public and public officials alike is that a 2012 study at done at Oak Ridge National Laboratory *recommends Illinois as the optimal candidate for the first of these CIS facilities*. This would result in Illinois taking for indefinite storage up to 9,000 tons of additional spent fuel beyond the 9,000+ tons is already has.

“Illinois residents did not agree to become the nation’s nuclear waste dump but that is what we are. If a permanent geologic repository is not created the State of Illinois will likely get more waste shipped to and through it, putting us even more in danger of an accident at a nuclear facility or while waste is being transported,” observes **Gail Snyder, Board member of NEIS** from Homer Glen, Illinois.

At the end of the day, the whole process comes down to trust.

“The NRC says to the Courts and the public, ‘Trust that we will be on the job insuring safety of highly radioactive, long-lived, spent nuclear fuel indefinitely into the future,’ when one month ago they could not even guarantee they would have employees able to report to work,” Dave Kraft points out. “They’re not responsible for storing marshmallows or ping pong balls; they’re responsible for the mistake-free storage of some of the deadliest material humankind has ever created. After 30 years of verbal, unsubstantiated waste “con,” the public has no further confidence in NRC’s waste confidence,” Kraft concludes.

## COMPLETE QUOTES BY PRESENTERS

### **MAUREEN HEADINGTON, Stand Up, Save Lives! (630)234-2290:**

- “Radioactive waste cannot be safe, secure, clean, or green. It is toxic, deadly, and long-lasting. It irradiates cells, damages DNA, causes cancer, birth defects, heart problems, infertility.
- “The NRC it must abandon its so-called “Waste Confidence” policy and stop licensing nuclear reactors when there is no proven solution to the waste problem – except to stop making it!
- “The NRC Plan is to continue stockpiling it in our communities – indefinitely. Illinois is being considered for “Centralized Interim Storage” – a dump site for the nation’s highly irradiated fuel rods. Do you live in a ‘sacrifice zone’? An ‘evacuation zone’?”

### **LINDA LEWISON, Sierra Club Illinois Nuclear Free Committee, NEIS (773)505-3550 :**

The Sierra Club is dedicated to creating a sustainable future for all mankind that is without dependence on fossil and nuclear fuels. We need to phase out these old, dirty, deadly, and prohibitively expensive technologies as quickly as possible and move on. The problem of what to do with radioactive waste - to pick the "safest of the unsafe" alternatives - will be with us for all time. We only get one chance to get it right. We do not have confidence in the NRC. How can they continue to license and relicense nuclear reactors with no plan in place for a permanent geological repository? It is like building a house without a bathroom. We wouldn't buy that house. And we don't buy this lack of a plan.

### **DR. LORA CHAMBERLAIN of Nuclear Free Illinois, (773) 486-7660**

“The members of Nuclear Free Illinois know that the NRC has not lived up to it's duty to the American people in regards to radioactive nuclear waste. For too long they have been kicking the can down the road about where to put the tons of nuclear waste that have been piling up at America's nuclear power plants. We are at dangerous overcapacity in spent fuel ponds at most of the plants across the country, especially the many nuclear plants in IL. Now they want to move all of this dangerous radioactive waste to temporary storage, possibly at IL nuclear plants. We are at risk if this dangerous waste is shipped across America, we are at risk if this radioactive waste is stockpiled in IL. We want the NRC to stop making this dangerous waste and find a permanent solution, we want the NRC to stop kicking the can down the road! Our children deserve a safe nuclear free future.”

### **GAIL SNYDER, Board member, Nuclear Energy Information Service, (630)363-6417:**

“Unbeknownst to Illinois residents they are carrying a large portion of the liability and risk for the nuclear industry in the event of an accident at a nuclear facility.

“Illinois residents did not agree to become the nation’s nuclear waste dump but that is what we are. If a permanent geologic repository is not created the State of Illinois will likely get more waste shipped to and through it putting us even more in danger of an accident at a nuclear facility or while waste is being transported.

“I don’t think the residents of Illinois realize that in order to have these nuclear facilities the government and industry have determined what level of risk is okay to subject people to. In the event of a nuclear accident residents homes, communities, businesses and health may become part of the collateral damage and when people understand that I don’t think they would agree to take those risks. Look at Fukushima people didn’t sign up for that when they were asked to support nuclear energy.”

### **BETTE PIERMAN of Michigan Safe Energy Future, (269) 369-3993 (c)**

“While reviewing the documents for comment, the term “adequate” repeatedly appears regarding the steps currently used to store toxic nuclear waste. Whenever I hear the term used by NRC staff to describe any of the nuclear plants across the country, but in particular Entergy’s Palisades Nuclear Plant, I cringe. I am not sure how the use of this term is supposed to be reassuring to the public since it means “good enough.” The connotation connected with “good enough” is mediocre. So, I ask you, how safe would you feel with an

“adequate” pilot on a turbulent transcontinental flight? Or, how quickly would you employ an “adequate” heart surgeon if you required surgery? Yet, you throw the word “adequate” around to the public like that is supposed to reassure us about the safety of these aging, decrepit nuclear power plants around this country and what you propose as the generic treatment of waste storage for a number of years far into the future. This member of the public does not share your confidence! “