

Safe Management of Radioactive and Other “Special” Waste



Through legislation in 2009, Texas made the unprecedented decision to allow a private company to meet our legal low-level radioactive waste compact obligations and clean up low-level radioactive waste produced in Texas and the State of Vermont through the Texas Compact. Under the agreement, the State of Vermont paid the State of Texas millions of dollars to help take care of their waste. While a promise was made by the private company, Waste Control Specialists, to build a site for the compact low-level radioactive waste from Texas and Vermont, a series of permit amendments and special-interest legislation has caused the site to host a variety of other radioactive waste streams, including federal low-level radioactive waste, low-level radioactive waste from other states, depleted uranium, and even forms of mercury. This site was intended for Texas and Vermont waste, but we have somehow shouldered the unnecessary burden of federal radioactive waste and waste from all over the U.S.

Now, the company Texas hired has joined forces with a corporation from France, and asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for permission to build an “interim” storage project for high-level radioactive waste. Called the Interim Storage Project, or ISP, the project (if authorized) could bring more than 40,000 tons of high-level radioactive waste from nuclear reactors over rail lines and highways, through our major cities, to be put on a pad out in Andrews County in West Texas, near the border with New Mexico.

Who would guarantee financial assurance should the project go belly-up? What if there is an accident bringing waste from nuclear reactors to a pad in West Texas for “interim” storage? Why would we bring waste to West Texas only to then send it somewhere else once a final disposal site is identified for our nuclear waste issue?

The Texas Legislature must reject any attempt to authorize Texas statutes that allow interim storage solutions in our great state. Bringing high-level radioactive waste through our communities to sit and bake in the West Texas sun near the Dockum and Ogallala Aquifers, geological fissures, sinkholes, and oil and gas production is a bad idea. Indeed, the Legislature may want to consider requiring further financial and other safeguards in case the NRC approves this ridiculous idea.

In addition to radioactive waste, there are a number of other “special” wastes that Texas needs legislative action on. Safe disposal requirements for used and scrap tires, updating standards for municipal solid waste landfills, and dealing with our legacy of toxic wastes found at State Superfund Sites all need and deserve legislative action.

Sierra Club
2018