 Statement by Nuclear Security Coalition on Release of National Academy Sciences Study

Today, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) released a declassified study which finds that pools storing highly radioactive waste at the nation’s nuclear power plants are vulnerable to terrorist attack. Congress commissioned the study over a year ago, but its release has been held up since last summer by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which disagrees with NAS’s findings. The coalition issued the following statement today after reviewing the declassified version of the NAS study:

“The release of NAS’s study puts to rest any doubts about the danger we all face: nuclear waste at our nation’s nuclear power plants is vulnerable to attack. We applaud the Academy for its scientific integrity and its perseverance in seeing to it that these important findings are made public.

“As with the release of the 9/11 Commission Report, today’s release of the NAS study demands action. It is not enough to know the danger. Congress must pass legislation that gets waste out of overcrowded pools. NAS also points out that current dry storage is not without its own vulnerabilities and must be improved.

“Since August 10, 2004, the coalition has focused a petition to the NRC on the vulnerability of nuclear waste storage pools elevated to unprotected roof tops in 32 nuclear power stations around the country. A pre-9/11 NRC study identifies that 32 GE Boiling Water Mark I and Mark II reactors’ ‘secondary containments generally do not appear to have any significant structures that might reduce the likelihood of aircraft penetration,’ potentially resulting in the drain-down of the protective water shield around the nuclear waste and a catastrophic nuclear fire.

“The unsuitability of Yucca Mountain and growing opposition to a proposed dump site in Utah make it clear that nuclear waste will remain at reactor sites for decades to come, if not in perpetuity. Congress must go the next step and require the deployment of more secure on-site storage systems.”

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The Nuclear Security Coalition is a national group of 47 public interest organizations advocating for improved security at nuclear power plants.