

Nuclear Waste and West Valley: A Factsheet August 2012

Nuclear Waste is the "Achilles Heel" of the Nuclear Industry. Each plant produces tons of high level extremely radioactive fuel as waste, since it can no longer be used in the reactor to generate energy. After 40 years of operation, reactors can have 1200 tons or more of this used, but lethal fuel stored on site.

After more than a half century, governments, scientists and the private sector worldwide have not been able to devise a solution to mounting radioactive waste. There is NO solution to nuclear waste and it is very dangerous for millions of years. So waste quantities keep growing, primarily stored on-site at nuclear reactors in water filled pools. Some of it has been moved to dry casks, which are much safer than pool storage. In general, the industry does not want to pay the costs of dry casks. Largely because of the long- term danger to future generations, most communities are reluctant to volunteer to become a disposal site. In fact the US has been unable to site a permanent repository for decades.

As you can also imagine the management of nuclear waste is very costly. It must be isolated from humans and their water and food supply. Radioactivity must be contained and not allowed to leak and spread radiation.

Early promoters of nuclear energy told us it would be "too cheap to meter." These promoters did not really consider the high costs of the entire nuclear life chain. While the government has been willing to pay for mining and uranium enrichment and also willing to provide substantial funding for nuclear plant construction, the government has deliberately evaded its responsibilities related to nuclear waste that is created at every step. It has also been willing to sacrifice communities and especially native Americans to nuclear programs.

At West Valley, NY the federal government is doing its best to limit the costs of cleaning up a disastrous project it promoted in the 1960s-- the reprocessing of nuclear wastes. In just 7 years the private contractor had thoroughly contaminated the site. Since reprocessing ends up creating more waste than they started with there has been a cleanup effort going on since the 1980s, largely focused on what DOE will and will not do. The major creek running from the site is upstream of Seneca territory.

Today we see clearly that the DOE agenda is to leave as much waste as it can get away with at the West Valley site, despite the fact that erosion will cause radioactive contamination to be released to the creeks and eventually the Great Lakes. We believe the principal motivation for DOE to leave waste in-place at nuclear waste sites, is to keep costs as low as possible.



If the TRUE and necessary costs were tallied for proper management of nuclear waste, then nuclear energy could never be seen as a viable energy source. Even Wall Street which has been willing to invest heavily in very risky things, like derivatives, will not invest in nuclear reactors. Our nation's "need" for nuclear weapons is a key driver for continuing to subsidize the nuclear industry.

We are working to obtain a Full and Complete Cleanup of the West Valley site.

NO CONFIDENCE about Nuclear Wastes

With no repository to send all this used nuclear and highly radioactive fuel, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission made a decision that it "was confident" that a storage site for nuclear waste could be found.

And even if a storage site was not found it would "be safe" to store radioactive fuel for 60 years after a nuclear reactor officially shuts down. The NY Attorney General, Eric Schneiderman brought a lawsuit assisted by 3 other states, and other intervenors, including NIRS, one of the groups trying to obtain a cleanup at West Valley.

In a major Court decision, this year the Court ruled that NRC had not studied the issue at all, thus failing to fulfill environmental assessment requirements. As a result NRC must go back and study the issue thoroughly before proceeding. After over a half century of the government telling us that nuclear waste would be a simple challenge to solve, for the very first time, there is now NO Confidence about Nuclear Waste and its future.

Yesterday, August 7th, the NRC suspended all final decisions on nuclear plant licensing and renewals until the NRC finishes its review of waste storage safety and environmental impacts. The re-licensing of the Indian Point facilities will be delayed, and hopefully halted altogether. Licensing and renewals will proceed, but waste issues will be dealt with at a later date.

This opens the door to challenge the overcrowded and very dangerous situation of these fuel pools at every reactor around the country. At Fukushima nuclear fuel was distributed widely following the explosions at the nuclear reactors there.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition www.cectoxic.org

Nuclear Information and Resource Service www.nirs.org

Indigenous Women's Initiatives www.iwinitiatives.org

Partially funded by a grant from the New Mexico Community Foundation Community Involvement Fund