

What is happening at the West Valley Nuclear Waste Site?
Plans for Radioactive Building Demolition and Moving High Level Waste Outside;
Changing Contractors; Choosing Who Does Important Studies

West Valley is the only place in North America where a private company attempted to commercially “reprocess” high level nuclear power and weapons waste. Nuclear Fuel Services was licensed by the US Atomic Energy Commission to bring in the most radioactive waste (*irradiated fuel* sometimes called “spent” fuel from the cores of reactors), which could kill anyone exposed in seconds if unshielded. The irradiated nuclear fuel was chopped up, dissolved in chemicals to remove plutonium and uranium and the rest of the radioactive chemicals—some hazardous for many millions of years—were left as radioactive chemical liquid in 2 large tanks in the ground. Other nuclear wastes were buried in burial grounds at the site.

The private company that did this, Nuclear Fuel Services, left the site in the early 1980s. The site was left to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). In the early 1980s the US Department of Energy (DOE) was brought in to convert the high level radioactive “reprocessing” liquid in the tanks into a solid because the big underground tanks were only designed to last 30 or 40 years and everyone feared that the liquid would leak out. The waste remains deadly much much longer than the tanks would last. DOE converted most of the radioactive liquid into solid creating 275 massive, intensely radioactive “logs” 10 feet tall which are now stored in the old, heavily shielded reprocessing building. There is still high level radioactive sludge in the tanks and other radioactive waste in the burial grounds.

The plan now is to **demolish the whole, thick-walled reprocessing building** in the coming years but first the long-lasting, **extremely radioactive logs** (up to 7600 rads/hour— far above a lethal dose ~500-1000 rads) **would be moved** into metal casks that will be designed to last 50 years (waste still extremely dangerous for hundreds of thousands to millions of years), and move them **outside** without additional shielding like the building is providing. They very likely could stay there longer because no permanent repository is expected in 50 years. **We need to pay attention to this!**

We need to pay attention to the building demolition—to make as sure as we can that it is done in a way that prevents or minimizes radioactivity released into the air.

Also, a **radioactive leak, referred to as the “strontium plume,”** at the site, believed by many to be from a spill in the 1960s, is **spreading below the surface**. A long filtering wall has been put in place underground to try to remove some of the radioactivity from the contaminated water before it gets into the Cattaraugus Creek.

New companies—CH2M Hill and Babcock & Wilcox called **CHBWW**—came in and the former contractor left Aug 29, 2011. Many employees were rehired but ~90 were cut.

NYSERDA and DOE are hiring a supposedly Independent Scientific Panel and **another company**, not publicly announced yet, **to manage studies** over the next 10 years to determine whether to remove or leave the waste at the eroding site.

This and future updates will be posted at <http://www.bit.ly/WestValleyNuclearInfo>