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Contacts:

Karen Hadden, Executive Director, SEED Coalition, 512-797-8481
Tom “Smitty” Smith, Director of Public Citizen’s Texas office, 512-637-9455

Texas At Risk of Becoming the Nation’s Radioactive Waste Dumping Ground; Rules Being Rushed Through During Holiday Season

Austin, TX A proposed radioactive waste import/export rule would open Texas up to becoming the nation’s radioactive waste dumping ground, allowing waste from around the country to go to Waste Control Specialists’ site in Andrews County in West Texas, instead of limiting the site to the Compact states of Texas and Vermont.

“More radioactive waste would mean increased financial, health and environmental risks,” said SEED Coalition Director Karen Hadden. “Analysis by nuclear expert Dr. Arjun Makhijani found that if the license was expanded and non-Compact states were allowed in, there could be nineteen times more radioactive waste than originally planned for.”

Three Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) staff members resigned over the licensing the site. In 2007, TCEQ staff recommended denying the radioactive waste license, saying that “groundwater is likely to intrude into the proposed disposal units and contact the waste from either or both of two water tables near the proposed facility.” Radioactive contamination of water could result.

Nuclear reactor vessels, “poison curtains” that absorb reactor core radioactivity, and radioactive sludges and resins could all be sent to the site. There is not a single radionuclide that can’t go to a so-called “low-level” radioactive waste dump. “Six commercial radioactive waste dumps have leaked and cleanup will cost billions of dollars,” said Diane D’Arrigo of Nuclear Information and Resource Service.

Exposure to radioactive materials can cause cancer, birth defects, reduced immunity and even death, depending on the type of radioactive material and the level of exposure.

“Dallas billionaire Harold Simmons, owner of Waste Control Specialists (WCS), would reap the profits, while citizens bear all the risks,” said Tom “Smitty” Smith of Public Citizen. “Federal agencies and legislators should examine the increased risks of rail and highway accidents if radioactive waste was shipped from around the country as well as whether emergency responders are equipped to deal with accidents involving radioactive spills.”

The rule was published November 26th, starting a 30-day public comment period that ends Dec. 26th. Comments can be sent to rule.comment@tllrwdcc.org. A public hearing will be held December 9th at TCEQ, Building E, Room 201 in Austin, Texas. Learn more at www.NukeFreeTexas.org.