

# Fact Sheet on High-Level Nuclear Waste Dump in New Mexico

## **1. What are the dangers posed by High-Level Nuclear Waste?**

High-Level Nuclear Waste is one of the most dangerous substances on the planet. The waste emits invincible gamma radiation, through the thin casks it is transported in, that can be dangerous to our health, especially to women and children.<sup>1</sup> This waste also contains extremely dangerous contaminants, such as plutonium, that could be released into the environment in the case of a transport accident or a cask leak. Minimal amounts of inhaled plutonium is known to be toxic,<sup>2</sup> and to be a cause of cancer.

## **2. What is a Centralized Interim Storage Facility?**

If licensed, a Centralized Interim Storage Facility could store High-Level Radioactive Waste, currently stored at the nuclear power plants across the United States, until a permanent repository is constructed.<sup>3</sup> Applicants have discussed storing the waste for up to 100 years.

## **3. The Contractor Is Holtec Partnering With The Eddy Lea Energy Alliance**

For a Centralized Interim Storage Facility to be constructed it must first be licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Recently, the Corporation Holtec has put in an application to begin the licensing procedure. Holtec has an agreement with the Eddy Lea Energy Alliance, which is a company owned by Carlsbad and Hobbs consisting of the Mayor of Hobbs and others in the area, allowing Holtec to buy the property where the facility would be located.<sup>4</sup>

## **4. Radioactive Releases Threaten Our Health, Environment, and Ways of Life**

Our land could be contaminated for generations, destroying our way of life (ranching, agriculture, oil industries, and tourism) as we know it. Visitors spent \$186 million in 2015 in Lea County alone,<sup>5</sup> all that revenue would be threatened if SE New Mexico became the nation's High-Level Radioactive Waste nuke dump. A nuke dump also threatens the 270 million dollar agricultural industry in Lea County and the 149 million dollar ag industry in Eddy County<sup>6</sup>. See page 13 in the NM Agricultural Statistics put out by the NM Department of Ag and the US Department of Ag. A radioactive release could result in a similar situation to that of Chernobyl and Fukushima. These areas are now sacrifice zones because the water, air, and land are extremely contaminated and dangerous for all life.<sup>7</sup> Each canister holds as much Cesium-137 as was released in the Chernobyl accident.<sup>8</sup>

## **5. Transport Increases Risk Especially When Transported Twice**

Transporting the nation's nuclear waste to New Mexico via train/rail lines will put New Mexicans at an unacceptable level of risk, as well as the rest of the nation. Furthermore, the canisters Holtec has proposed are susceptible to cracking and are unfit to transport nuclear waste.<sup>9</sup> Also, creating a temporary facility will result in double exposure because when a less risky permanent repository is found the waste will have to be moved again.

## **6. Insurance Companies Do Not Cover Nuclear Accidents**

Accepting High-Level Radioactive Waste would expose taxpayers and property owners to an unacceptable level of risk and liability in case of an accident, which would bankrupt our families and businesses. ELEA, a limited liability company owned by the cities of Carlsbad and Hobbs, and Eddy County and Lea County...we already know how limited that liability will be when

<sup>1</sup> Nuclear Information and Resource Service. Gender and Radiation. [www.nirs.org/category/radiation/health-effects/](http://www.nirs.org/category/radiation/health-effects/)

<sup>2</sup> Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Background on Plutonium. [www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/plutonium](http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/plutonium)

<sup>3</sup> Nuclear Information and Resource Service. Consolidated Interim Storage. [www.nirs.org/campaigns/dont-waste-america/cis/](http://www.nirs.org/campaigns/dont-waste-america/cis/)

<sup>4</sup> Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Holtec International. [www.nrc.gov/waste/spent-fuel-storage/cis/holtec-international](http://www.nrc.gov/waste/spent-fuel-storage/cis/holtec-international)

<sup>5</sup> Albuquerque Business First. [www.bizjournals.com/albuquerque/news/2016/10/17/see-the-breakdown-of-tourisms-impact-in-each-new](http://www.bizjournals.com/albuquerque/news/2016/10/17/see-the-breakdown-of-tourisms-impact-in-each-new)

<sup>6</sup> NM Department of Agriculture and US Department of Agriculture. New Mexico Agricultural Statistics. [www.nmda.nmsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Ag-Stats2015.pdf](http://www.nmda.nmsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Ag-Stats2015.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Background on Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Accident. [www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/chernobyl-bg](http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/chernobyl-bg)

<sup>8</sup> San Onofre Safety. Handouts. [sanonofresafety.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/doe-designedtoleak2016-04-04handout1.pdf](http://sanonofresafety.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/doe-designedtoleak2016-04-04handout1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> San Onofre Safety. Holtec. [sanonofresafety.org/holtec-hi-storm-umax-nuclear-waste-dry-storage-system/](http://sanonofresafety.org/holtec-hi-storm-umax-nuclear-waste-dry-storage-system/)

things go wrong as we have seen at WIPP. A very small group of public officials and their lobbyists are putting a larger population at risk who are not informed about their plans and associated threats to our air, lands and water.

## **7. NM Has Large Hispanic Population Making This an Environmental Injustice**

An environmental injustice occurs when certain communities are disproportionately affected by toxic environments. People of color have been targeted in the past, which is concerning since NM has a 48% Hispanic/Latino community.<sup>10</sup> According to a report done by the United Church of Christ, race can be a main factor in determining where a toxic facility is sited.<sup>11</sup> We must avoid this injustice at all cost.

## **8. NM Taking All The Nation's High-Level Radioactive Waste Is an Unfair, Unjust Burden**

New Mexico, one of the poorest states in the country, does not have a single nuclear power plant and has had no economic benefit from nuclear power. We should not be burdened with accepting radioactive high level waste from 78 reactor sites in the 34 states that have nuclear power.<sup>12</sup> Store the waste where it was created, instead of dumping it on New Mexico.

## **9. Building a Centralized Interim Storage Facility Is Currently Against The Law**

Currently the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 and its amendments requires that a permanent repository, to store High-Level Radioactive Waste, must be licensed before a Centralized Interim Storage Facility is constructed.<sup>13</sup> Currently, Yucca Mountain in Nevada is the only proposed permanent repository, however, the state of Nevada has highly opposed the licensing of Yucca Mountain for 20 years. A bad bill by Rep. Shimkus, HR 3053, that Congress may consider soon would allow Centralized Interim Storage to proceed and Yucca Mountain to move forward again

## **10. What is a de facto permanent waste dump?**

This could result if a temporary Centralized Interim Storage Facility keeps the waste because it has no other place to go. The waste could end up staying at this facility if there is no other places in the country to store it or the political will to move it is gone. Keeping high-level nuclear waste at a facility that is designed for temporary storage can be very dangerous because over time future generations would have to deal with radioactive releases into their environment. Applicants have discussed storing this waste for up to 100 years. It is essential to avoid any chance of a de facto permanent resting place in NM.

## **11. It Is Much Safer to Distribute Rather Than Consolidate The Risks**

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality acknowledged it is less safe to consolidate all the nation's nuclear waste into one single location rather than distributing the risk of accident or terrorist attack by storing waste near the facility which created it.<sup>14</sup> The safest way forward is to implement Hardened On-Site Storage, in which, High-Level Radioactive Waste would be secured in thick walled canisters, instead of the currently used thin walled canisters.<sup>15</sup> Up to 200 organizations, from around the country, have signed onto the Hardened On-Site Storage Principles as the best solution until a permanent repository is constructed.

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<sup>10</sup> US Census Bureau. Quick Facts New Mexico. [www.census.gov/quickfacts/NM](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NM)

<sup>11</sup> United Church of Christ. Toxic Waste and Race in the US. [www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries\\_toxic-waste-20](http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries_toxic-waste-20)

<sup>12</sup> Nuclear Regulatory Commission. [www.nrc.gov/waste/spent-fuel-storage/map-fuel-storage-facilities.pdf](http://www.nrc.gov/waste/spent-fuel-storage/map-fuel-storage-facilities.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Department of Energy. Nuclear Waste Policy Act. [www.energy.gov/downloads/nuclear-waste-policy-act](http://www.energy.gov/downloads/nuclear-waste-policy-act)

<sup>14</sup> TCEQ, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1100389-tceq-assessment-of-texas-high-level-radioactive.html>

<sup>15</sup> Nuclear Information and Resource Service. HOSS Principles. [www.nirs.org/dwa-hoss-principles/](http://www.nirs.org/dwa-hoss-principles/)