Government and Industry Witnesses at Congressional Hearing Present Inaccurate Testimony Regarding Past High-Level Radioactive Waste Transports

Leaks Have Occurred

Capitol Hill, Washington D.C.—A witness at the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Environment and Economy hearing today on “Transporting Nuclear Materials,” Robert Quinn, Vice President of Cask and Container Technology at EnergySolutions, and Chair of the U.S. Nuclear Infrastructure Council’s Spent Fuel Transportation Task Force, said in his written statement (and echoed in his oral remarks), after describing past U.S. and even international shipments of irradiated nuclear fuel, “In all of these spent fuel shipments there has been no failure of a package and no release of radioactive materials.”

Yet another hearing witness, Christopher Kouts, former Acting Director of DOE’s Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, also stated “Over the long history of high-level waste shipments there have been accidents, but none of those accidents released radioactive materials.”

However, in a 1996 document posted online <http://www.state.nv.us/nucwaste/trans/nucinc01.htm> entitled “Reported Incidents Involving Spent Nuclear Fuel Shipments, 1949 to Present (72 incidents by type),” Halstead documented four incidents in which “Radioactive material contamination beyond the vehicle,” had, in fact, occurred. Halstead documented another four incidents in which “Radioactive material contamination confined to vehicle,” although radioactivity had leaked out of the irradiated nuclear fuel shipping container.

Another hearing witness, Edward R. Hamberger, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Association of American Railroads, stated “To our knowledge, there has never been a release of radioactive materials in connection with the transportation of SNF by rail.”

However, Halstead’s 1996 report documents one rail incident in which there was “Radioactive material contamination beyond the vehicle,” and another rail incident in which there was “Radioactive material contamination confined to vehicle.”

The witnesses’ written testimonies, and video recording of the hearing, are posted at: http://energycommerce.house.gov/hearing/transporting-nuclear-materials-design-logistics-and-shipment