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Great Lakes Groups Question Newly Discovered Radioactive Waste Shipments from Illinois through Great Lakes Region

Deadly fuel would move from LaSalle nuclear reactors through Port Huron, Michigan

Port Huron, MI -- Groups concerned about the Great Lakes are asking “Why is irradiated nuclear fuel being moved? Where is it going? What happens at the destination?” They are calling for answers after a highway transport route for high-level radioactive waste from the LaSalle nuclear power reactors in Illinois to the “Port of Exit” at Port Huron, Michigan was uncovered by a diligent watchdog group. The implication of the Port of Exit is that the waste would either continue by ground travel into Canada or be transferred to water transport on the St Clair River and the connecting waterways to the Great Lakes.

A brief letter dated July 13, 2018, from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to “Secured Transportation Services,” cites an application under 45 day review by the NRC, for a highway transport route for lethal high level radioactive waste (irradiated fuel) from the LaSalle nuclear reactors in Illinois to the “Port Huron, Michigan Port of Exit.” [1] The letter was found July 23rd, buried among 467 documents on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s (NRC) online ADAMS library, under an obscure title. The number of transports is not given, but, depending on how much nuclear waste is shipped from the LaSalle reactors, could be in the hundreds.

Oddly, Port Huron is named as a “Port of Exit,” not a Point of Exit as is usually cited for road/truck shipments. This suggests a possible water route (though it is not confirmed) to an unknown destination. The letter only refers to shipping from central Illinois to Port Huron by a land route. It does not reveal where or how the waste would move from there, raising big questions about why it is being moved.

An NRC spokesman on this issue, Mr. Alex Sapountzis, is quoted in an email (pasted at the end of the release) to an NRC librarian as stating that “details of all spent nuclear fuel routes are designated as Safeguards Information/sensitive information and therefore will not be placed in ADAMS. [Note: ADAMS is the NRC’s online library.] All a member of the public will see in ADAMS is that in a letter we state we accepted for review a route (it has all the information we need to conduct our review) and then an approval letter (based on the
The applicant submitted, we accept the route and for transport by road it’s good for 5 years or by rail for 7 years.” [2]

The email suggests that approval of the route is taken for granted. To all appearances, a review is superficial, a done deal.

“We have serious concerns about shipping high-level radioactive waste from Exelon’s LaSalle reactors to a port city,” said David Kraft, director of the Chicago-based Nuclear Energy Information Service. “Except in cases of extreme emergency, we believe that irradiated fuel should only be moved once for permanent isolation.”

The larger questions – where is the nuclear waste going and why?

“Why are these lethal wastes being moved? Is it for storage elsewhere? Experimentation or testing? How much waste and how many shipments will travel over the route in the 5 years for trucking on roads and 7 years for rail shipments that NRC would approve?” asked Diane D’Arrigo, of Nuclear Information and Resource Service.

If the wastes are exiting the U.S. at Port Huron but not by water, it would have to be going to Canada by either road or rail. Are our Canadian neighbors aware of this potential? Are they prepared for these potentially deadly shipments on their roads and railways? Are we?

Why send the waste to Port Huron - a city with reportedly just one deepwater port, largely used for recreation, not known to be used for large industrial shipments? Port Huron, on the St. Clair River, is part of critical connecting channels linking the Upper and Lower Great Lakes. A ground route would take the wastes either over the Blue Water Bridge, which crosses the St. Clair River, or by rail, through a tunnel that connects the two countries. “A spill, release or fire here or near waterways that flow into the St. Clair River, could potentially ruin one of the largest fresh water deltas in the world – the St. Clair Flats – and potentially poison forever, drinking water and freshwater ecosystems for up to 40 + million people of the Great Lakes, including residents of Canada, the U.S., U.S. Tribes, First Nations and other Indigenous Peoples,” stated Kay Cumbow of Great Lakes Environmental Alliance, Port Huron, MI.

Because these wastes are high security risks, moving them will mean militarizing our highways and possibly the Great Lakes.

“Have first responders and communities along potential route(s) been made aware of the dangers to human life, if there is an accident or attack resulting in catastrophic release of these hazardous highly radioactive wastes?” asked Kevin Kamps, of Beyond Nuclear, in Takoma Park, Maryland.

“Why risk sending deadly radioactive wastes through our communities and Great Lakes watersheds?” asked Michael Keegan, spokesperson for Don’t Waste Michigan and Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes, Monroe, Michigan. “Where are these fuel rods going and what’s the whole purpose behind it? American taxpayers and communities at risk along the routes deserve to know.”
“Where are these wastes going?” Mr. Keegan added: “Is Canada or Europe the final destination?”

Note: For a description or irradiated nuclear fuel, see: Nuclear Information and Resource Service, https://www.nirs.org/radioactive-waste/hlw/

References


Addendum

-------- Original Message --------

Subject: NRC highway route document
Date: Wed, 25 Jul 2018 16:43:25 +0000
From: PDR Resource <PDR.Resource@nrc.gov>
To: kcumbow@greatlakes.net <kcumbow@greatlakes.net>

Hello Ms. Cumbow,

Thank you for your call earlier today to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Public Document Room. You were seeking a 5/17/2018 route application for transportation of spent nuclear fuel from Secured Transportation Services to the NRC (referenced in ML18193A031).

I heard back from Alex Sapountzis who told me that “the details of all SNF routes are designated as Safeguards Information/sensitive information and therefore will not be placed in ADAMS. All a member of the public will see in ADAMS is that in a letter we state we accepted for review a route (it has all the information we need to conduct our review) and then an approval letter (based on the information the applicant submitted, we accept the route and for transport by road it’s good for 5 years or by rail for 7 years).”

They are in the process of conducting the 45 day review of the route application, so at some point after that time, the letter or acceptance (if it is accepted) will be found in ADAMS.

I hope this will be helpful.

Sincerely,

Anne Perrera Goel

Anne Perrera Goel
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Public Document Room
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
1-800-397-4209
PDR.resource@nrc.gov

If you found the help you received from the Public Document Room useful please send us a note regarding the value of the service you received.