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Opponents Are Fighting Radioactive Waste Dumping; Will Tell NRC to Protect Public Health and Safety, and Prevent Potential Disasters at Public Meetings Starting Oct. 1st

(Austin, TX) The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) will hold online public meetings on **October 1, 6, 8 and 15th** regarding a proposal that could result in thousands of shipments of deadly nuclear reactor waste through major cities across the country. Public comment on WCS' Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be accepted until **November 3, 2020**. A socially distanced protest will be held outside NRC Headquarters in Arlington, Texas (1600 E. Lamar Blvd) at 5 PM on October 1st, as the first public meeting commences.

"The health, safety and economic risks of hauling deadly nuclear reactor waste across the country and dumping it on Texas for decades are huge," said Karen Hadden, executive director of SEED Coalition. "The NRC claims that risks are SMALL, but these lies could cost lives. One study found that a transportation accident could result in 1370 latent cancer fatalities, with even more fatalities if people remained living in a contaminated area. If clean-up was even possible, it could cost \$270 billion."

"If Waste Control Specialists (WCS/ ISP) gets a license from the NRC, 40,000 tons of high-level radioactive waste from around the country could be dumped at their Andrews County, Texas site. Unprecedented massive transportation would create risks from accidents, leaks and potential terrorism," said former State Representative Lon Burnam. "There would be no facility at the site for repackaging cracked or corroded nuclear waste containers, so a disastrous de facto permanent dump is likely to result. This waste is supposed to go into a permanent repository designed to keep it isolated from living things for literally a million years. Moving it to Texas for storage would fail to accomplish this goal and only create additional risks."

The waste would be stored above-ground in extreme desert temperatures, in a region prone to intense storms, flooding, high winds, wildfires and earthquakes. Andrews County was the epicenter of a 4.7 earthquake in 1992. The Ogallala Aquifer is near the WCS site and contamination of this water could impact millions of people, wildlife, agriculture and businesses.

The proposed facility is illegal under the existing Nuclear Waste Policy Act. The NRC should not be considering the license at this time, one of many legal challenges underway.

"It would be massive environmental injustice to dump the nation's deadliest reactor waste from around the country on communities of color and transport it through Indigenous lands," said Alice Canestaro-Garcia, with Energia Mia in San Antonio.

"Our land is not the nation's dumping ground for dangerous high-level radioactive waste, with its risks for cancer, birth defects and deaths. Those who created the waste should take responsibility for it. Our sacred land is not their pay toilet," said Rose Gardner, who lives in Eunice, near the proposed radioactive waste storage site, and co-chairs Alliance for Environmental Strategies. "Our region already has radioactive poisons. We don't want any more and do not consent to taking high-level radioactive waste!"

“Real in-person public meetings should be held by the NRC in major cities along transportation routes, said Susybelle Gosslee with the League of Women Voters of Texas. “Webinar meetings are not the same thing. Forty percent of Texans don’t have internet access. As a result, many Texans are not informed or able to speak their minds about a critical issue that affects everyone in the state, especially those who live along train routes.”

“The public meeting process has been very flawed so far. It appears that the NRC will have four glorified conference calls for the WCS/ ISP application, completely inadequate as public meetings” said Diane D’Arrigo with Nuclear Information and Resource Service. “The meetings require use of both a phone and a computer. Participants must press *1 when they call in if they want to speak, but are not adequately notified that they need to do so. NRC personnel are never visible, nor are any participants, and we have no way to know who else is present on the call.”

“Public meetings should not be held until after coronavirus risks are really over,” said Adrian Shelley, Director of Public Citizen’s Texas Office. “The NRC should host meetings in major cities through which transportation of dangerous nuclear waste would occur, such as Dallas/ Ft. Worth, San Antonio, Houston, Midland and El Paso in Texas. The NRC previously held only one meeting in Texas, in the city of Andrews, and one in New Mexico, making it nearly impossible for many Texans to attend and participate.”

“Sixty organizations wrote to the NRC asking for in-person meetings in Texas and a dozen cities on transport routes nationwide, to be held after Covid risks are over and there is a safe, effective universally available vaccine,” said Kevin Kamps with Beyond Nuclear.

SEED Coalition, Sierra Club, Beyond Nuclear and Fasken Oil and Ranch have legal standing in opposing licensing of WCS’ proposed facility. An Atomic Safety and Licensing Board hearing was held, and appeals are underway with NRC Commissioners. Appeals to the U.S. Court of Appeals District of Columbia Circuit are anticipated. Well-documented health and safety concerns backed by expert testimony have been swept under the rug so far in legal proceedings.

High-level radioactive waste consists of highly irradiated fuel rods that have been inside an operating nuclear reactor. It is often called spent nuclear fuel, but most of the original uranium remains, along with plutonium, cesium and strontium. Spent nuclear fuel rods are over a million times more radioactive than the original fuel. Exposure to ionizing radiation can cause cancers, genetic damage and birth defects. **Exposure to unshielded spent fuel rods is lethal.**

The NRC will accept email comments at: WCS_CISF_EIS@nrc.gov. Docket ID, NRC-2016-0231, should be included in the subject line of comments.

Full meeting information and online template letters to NRC are at www.NoNuclearWaste.org.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for WCS/ ISP’s high-level radioactive waste storage proposal for Texas is at: <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML2012/ML20122A220.pdf>

DEIS Summary: <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML2012/ML20121A016.pdf> ###