

# These activists think they have solution to Texas' nuclear waste problem

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Two activists have met with Midland leaders, including representatives from Fasken Oil and Ranch, County Commissioner Randy Prude and U.S. Rep. August Pfluger, to discuss what they see as the solution to Texas' nuclear waste problem.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is currently reviewing an application for a high-level nuclear waste site in Andrews County that critics have argued would open the Permian Basin up for a potential terrorist attack, as well as the risk of a leak when the waste is transported by train through Midland County.

Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear and Lon Burnam of Public Citizen are trying to put pressure on the federal government to invest in what they believe is the safest way to store nuclear waste — hardened onsite storage.

"It's much better designed contain-

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ers with much better designed systems, fabricated well to last for as long as it's going to be needed to contain this stuff from the living environment, which is forever," Kamps said.

Kamps and Burnam worked on the defeat of Rep. Brooks Landgraf's House Bill 2692, which aimed to ban the storage of high-level nuclear waste in Texas. However, as noted in a letter from Rep. Tom Craddick to House Committee on Environmental Regulation members, the bill didn't have the power to ban waste because storage sites are decided at the federal level.

Burnam called the bill a "Trojan horse."

"This bill pretended to do something that it couldn't do," he said, noting the bill would have also given a tax break to Interim Storage Partners, the company seeking to build a waste storage site in

Andrews County.

A better solution, according to Kamps and Burnam, is to pass legislation at the federal level relating to hardened onsite storage, a concept first described by Dr. Gordon Thompson of the Institute for Resource and Security Studies in 2003.

They are proposing steel casks filled with dry nuclear waste be placed on individual concrete pads that are surrounded by earth or gravel barriers. The casks would also have airflow vents to prevent overheating.

Nuclear waste is currently stored in different containers depending on the storage site. Interim Storage Partners is proposing storing dry pellets of spent nuclear fuel in above-ground casks at the site in Andrews County.

Kamps and Burnam's plan also calls for moving waste from fuel pools and reactor sites where there is a potential for earthquakes or other risks. For waste that needs to be moved, they propose

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## WASTE

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constructing storage sites as close as possible to reactor sites to avoid risks from transportation.

And although ISP has applied for a license to store high-level waste temporarily for 40 years, the activists said any site needs to be built with permanent storage in mind because there's no permanent repository in the U.S. after construction of Yucca Mountain was discontinued.

Kamps and Burnam said they are hoping the U.S. Congress will use legislative power to enforce hardened onsite storage, which they said significantly lowers the risk of a terrorist attack because any release would be so insignificant that it becomes an unattractive target.

"Fasken has really moved the Texas congressional delegation, and I think we're going to make more headway this year than we've ever been able to make," Burnam said.