

WYOMING IS NOT THE PLACE FOR NUCLEAR WASTE

Storage of waste from the nation's nuclear waste reactors comes with significant and multigenerational consequences.

BACKGROUND

The Joint Minerals, Business & Economic Development Committee is sponsoring a bill that would open the door for temporary storage of high-level radioactive waste from across the nation in Wyoming. This draft bill — [“Used nuclear fuel storage-amendments”](#) — attempts to reclassify federally regulated high-level radioactive waste, or spent nuclear fuel from commercial nuclear reactors, by calling it “used nuclear fuel.” By using this more innocuous-sounding definition, legislators can streamline siting of a large-scale high level radioactive waste storage facility in Wyoming.

Streamlining this process is downright dangerous. It would bypass existing laws that require extensive environmental, social, and economic impact analyses and public comment opportunities. **Let's not waste our time, our tax dollars, or our state by becoming the nation's high-level radioactive waste dumping ground.**

WHAT IS HIGH-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE, AND WHY KEEP IT OUT OF WYOMING?

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission divides radioactive (or nuclear) waste into two categories: high-level and low-level. Low-level waste results from reactor operations and medical, academic, and industrial uses of radioactive materials. High-level waste, on the other hand, is mainly spent fuel taken from reactors after generating electricity. High-level radioactive waste is formed through a process known as fission, which creates a massive amount of energy, but also creates radioactive byproducts that take thousands of years to degrade. It is this extremely hazardous material that some legislators are trying to house in Wyoming.

High-level wastes produce fatal doses of radiation, even if periods of direct exposure are short. A much larger-scale problem arises when isotopes from high-level waste enters groundwater and rivers, and eventually reaches food chains. As the NRC says, “The dose produced through this indirect exposure would be much smaller than a direct-exposure dose, but a much larger population could be exposed.” For more information on the dangers of direct and indirect exposure to high-level waste, [you can read the NRC's Backgrounder on Radioactive Waste.](#)

During a July 2024 Joint Minerals Committee meeting, ceramic pellets of uranium-235, used in nuclear reactor fuel, were distributed — suggesting this was the benign material being discussed. However, what is actually being invited to Wyoming is highly radioactive, extremely hazardous material.

TALKING POINTS

There's no such thing as temporary storage of nuclear waste. There is no permanent solution for storing the nation's nuclear waste, thus temporary storage is a ruse for permanent storage — as most every other American state and community have fought against storing this toxic waste.

This is toxic material that will remain radioactive for tens of thousands of years. Passing around a uranium pellet, as happened in the July 2024 Joint Minerals meeting, is misleading and dangerous to the public and to our environment.

Nuclear waste in Wyoming will harm Wyoming businesses. The history of nuclear facilities creates many negative public perceptions about radioactivity, public health and safety, and vulnerability to accidents and terrorism that can harm our state's tourism, agriculture, pristine outdoor environment, and our ability to diversify our economy — as confirmed by studies in Tennessee, New Mexico, Texas, and Nevada.

Ground transportation of nuclear materials will subject communities across the state and nation to toxic waste. The frequency and distance of high-level radioactive waste shipments will be far greater than any our country has ever experienced. The result would be an unprecedented public safety experiment on our rails and roads, and through our neighborhoods.

It's not needed. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has found that wastes can be safely stored at reactor sites for the next 40–100 years and has passed a “Waste Confidence Rule” certifying this permitting certainty for industry.

Wyoming has repeatedly studied and said “NO” to nuclear waste storage.

- In 1991, the U.S. Department of Energy proposed a “Monitored Retrievable Storage” nuclear waste facility in Wyoming. Governor Mike Sullivan ended the project a year later, citing numerous concerns.
- A 1994 University of Wyoming poll showed that over 80 percent of residents opposed nuclear waste storage in Wyoming.
- In 1995, the Wyoming State Legislature passed laws regulating private and federal nuclear waste storage facilities, and included safeguards to assure that we do not become a *de facto* permanent repository site.
- In 1998, a company proposed a private facility to store nuclear waste. Governor Jim Geringer refused permission for a preliminary feasibility study, as outlined under Wyoming's law, ending the proposal.
- In 2019, a legislative Spent Fuel Rods Subcommittee studied the revenue opportunity for waste storage, and abandoned the effort due to restrictions and limited funds provided in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

Let's keep Wyoming from becoming a nuclear waste dumping ground.
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