

2061

Hearing Docket

From: Jonathan Hutchins [jrhutchins@tpac.org]
Sent: Tuesday, May 13, 2008 4:58 PM
To: Hearing Docket
Cc: bart.gordon@mail.house.gov
Subject: EnergySolutions Import License Application IW023

DOCKETED
USNRC

May 13, 2008
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Re: EnergySolutions Import License Application IW023.

May 14, 2008 (9:00am)

OFFICE OF SECRETARY
RULEMAKINGS AND
ADJUDICATIONS STAFF

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in regard to the proposal by EnergySolutions to import low and medium level nuclear waste into the United States from Italy for processing, disposal, and re-use.

As I understand it, the proposed method of transportation of the radioactive material, imported initially by ship, would then be by barge, rail, and truck into Tennessee for processing at two locations. Processed material would next be shipped out of the state and across the country by rail and over public highways to Utah for further processing, leading to disposal by incineration, landfill, recycling, or reshipment back to Italy.

The proposed processing locations in Tennessee at Memphis and Oak Ridge are located in densely populated urban areas, with Memphis being the 17th largest population center in the nation. Material on its way from Memphis to Oak Ridge would pass through other densely settled communities, including Nashville, the capital and the country's 29th largest population center. Oak Ridge, with a population of roughly 30,000 people, is 25 miles west of Knoxville, Tennessee, another major metro area. The Tennessee of Manhattan Project days are long gone, when vast expanses of unpopulated forestland shrouded Oak Ridge in secrecy.

Geologically, the area around and including Memphis is within the New Madrid seismic zone, a region expected with greater than 90% certainty to experience a magnitude 6 or 7 earthquake within the next 50 years, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Interestingly, East Tennessee is not immune to seismic activity, either, as pointed out by this 2003 USGS report on the East Tennessee Seismic Zone: *"The Eastern Tennessee seismic zone, which extends from south west Virginia to north east Alabama, is one of the most active earthquake areas in the Southeast. Although the zone has not had a large earthquake in historic times, a few earthquakes have caused slight damage. The largest recorded earthquake in this seismic zone was a magnitude 4.6 that occurred in 1973 near Knoxville. Sensitive seismographs have recorded hundreds of earthquakes too small to be felt in this seismic zone. Small, non-damaging, felt earthquakes occur about once a year."* With the near certainty that damaging earthquake activity will occur in the region within the next 50 years, does it strike one as prudent to import medium level nuclear material from another continent and ship it up the very river that flowed backward for three days in 1811 during that magnitude 8 earthquake?

Another aspect of this proposal that I find very troubling is the notion of importing another country's nuclear waste at a time when the United States is still formulating policy for the disposal of our own nuclear waste products. Proposed in 1978 with funding for the repository implemented in 1982, The Yucca Mountain site still remains in practical limbo due to the on-going national debate about geological safety of the site, and the efficacy of transportation, security, and storage methods. If the people of the United States cannot reach accord about the future of our spent nuclear fuel and associated waste, why would we entertain the idea of accepting another country's radioactive refuse?

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I would urge the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to deny the request by EnergySolutions to open their nuclear waste reclamation and disposal sites anywhere in the U.S., but particularly in Tennessee. There is no reason to believe that safety and security can realistically be assured in importing low and medium level nuclear waste from Italy and transporting it in stages across the North American continent. Further, stockpiling even more of this kind of radioactive refuse, when we are unable to effectively deal with the waste our nation generates, defies logic and can only benefit EnergySolutions and the Italians (though this proposal can certainly be viewed as a foot in the door by other countries lacking the capacity to deal with their own radioactive garbage). For the balance of us in the United States, this proposal is a losing one.

Sincerely,

Jonathan R. Hutchins
114 Donmond Drive
Hendersonville, TN 37075

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