

As of: 4/6/18 7:24 AM Received: April 05, 2018 Status: Pending_Post Tracking No. 1k2-92fa-6kgi Comments Due: May 29, 2018 Submission Type: Web

PUBLIC SUBMISSION

Docket: NRC-2018-0052
 Holtec International HI-STORE Consolidated Interim Storage Facility Project

Comment On: NRC-2018-0052-0001
 Holtec International HI-STORE Consolidated Interim Storage Facility Project

Document: NRC-2018-0052-DRAFT-0002
 Comment on FR Doc # 2018-06398

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83 FR 13802
 4/6/2018

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General Comment

The environmental risks posed by irradiated fuel are extreme: As observed by the U.S. Court of Appeals, it has "the capacity to outlast human civilization as we know it and the potential to devastate public health and the environment." Nuclear Energy Inst., Inc. v. Env'tl. Prot. Agency, 373 F.3d 1251 (D.C. Cir. 2004). If irradiated fuel is dispersed into the environment, its radionuclides are sufficiently toxic to cause irreparable contamination of large areas of land and entire river and lake systems and coastal ecosystems.

The risk of nuclear weapons proliferation posed by irradiated fuel is also significant. Each metric ton of spent fuel typically contains more than one Nagasaki-bomb equivalent of plutonium and, as of 2016, well over 70,000 metric tons had already been created in the United States by the commercial nuclear power reactors. Spent fuel, storage and/or disposal may pose a risk of theft if it is stored or disposed of in a manner that would allow access in a few hundred years, when the fission product radiation barrier would have declined to low levels.

Irradiated fuel poses hazards for periods of time far longer than human history and must be managed in a way that minimizes its environmental, health, and security risks to the extent possible. Nuclear power and nuclear weapons are intimately connected, not least in the issue of nuclear spent fuel and its management.

SUNSI Review Complete
 Template = ADM - 013
 E-RIDS = ADM-03

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ML 18102-A039 4/20/18