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*Under the auspices of Catholic Charities of Gallup Diocese*  
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U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
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**PUBLICATION DATE:**  
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**CITATION: 83 FR 13802**

**RE: Docket ID NRC-2018-0052, Holtec International's HI-STORE CIS Facility for Spent Nuclear Fuel, Lea County, New Mexico**

**NRC:**

As concerned people of faith in communities in New Mexico, we respectfully submit these comments on the Holtec Environmental Report (ER) to bring up to 100,000 metric tons of spent fuel, high-level radioactive waste, from nuclear reactors around the country to southeast New Mexico.

In light of our Covenant relationship with our Creator to be responsible stewards of God's gifts intended for the life and wellbeing of the entire community of life, we strongly oppose plans to make New Mexico a national radioactive waste dumping ground or to transporting up to 10,000 canisters of highly radioactive waste irresponsibly putting at risk the lives, health and environment of thousands of communities throughout our country. There are moral, ethical and environmental justice principles that must be included in all decision-making that threatens human lives, communities, wildlife and the environment. We should not have to risk the death-dealing contamination of our land, aquifers, air, the health of vegetation, wildlife and livestock, endangering present and future generations in the United States.

**This Holtec Proposal Is Contrary to Current Law**

- Current law only allows the U.S. Department of Energy to take title to commercial spent fuel "following commencement of operation of a repository" or at a DOE-owned and operated monitored retrievable storage facility. The Holtec site meets neither requirement, as it is a private facility.
- The Holtec Plan is an ill-fated experiment, a temporary, stop-gap measure that contributes nothing toward a long-term strategy for storing our nation's spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste that will protect public safety and national security, preserve our natural resources and environment. A stop-gap, temporary plan is not a solution to the real challenge. It does not provide the required long-term solution of verifiably safe, permanent storage of lethal radioactive waste from over 60 nuclear power plants in the U.S.

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- Nuclear waste should be stored in hardened, secure facilities at or near reactor sites until a permanent, scientifically-proven, publically-acceptable, and ethically-chosen waste solution is implemented. Ending the generation of nuclear waste is essential to addressing the waste crisis.

**The Impacts of Permanent Storage Must Be Analyzed**

- The Environment Report (ER) is inadequate and incomplete because it does not analyze the impact of the spent fuel being left at the Holtec site indefinitely. Holtec is requesting from NRC a 40-year license to store the waste in Lea County, with the opportunity to extend the license to 120 years. Holtec stated in its license application that the waste could be stored there for 300 years.

**More Alternatives Must Be Analyzed**

- Keeping the spent fuel casks in some form of Hardened On Site Storage (HOSS) on the reactor sites must be analyzed.
- The alternative of consolidated storage being done at an existing licensed Independent Spent Fuel Storage Facility (ISFSF) must be analyzed.
- According to government statistics, 34 nuclear power plants in the U.S. have been permanently shut down. Also, two unfinished nuclear reactor plants in South Carolina have been abandoned, and are only 40% completed, after an investment of 9 billion dollars.
- More comprehensive research and alternative proposals by NRC need to be put forth on how the 34 shuttered, high-security nuclear power plants and 2 abandoned, uncompleted power plants are being considered for permanent storage of the nation's lethal nuclear waste.

**The Environmental Report Inadequately Discusses the Transportation Risks**

- This ER must include all transportation routes and the potential impacts of accidents or terrorism incidents on public health and safety along all the routes.
- The ER is inadequate and incomplete because it does not discuss how rail shipments from reactors without rail access would be accomplished and the risks and impacts of such shipments.
- The weight of each waste-filled canister would be approximately 40% heavier than current railcar weight limitations creating massive risks of derailments. The national transportation risks endangering every community along the route, posing dangers to millions of people in 44 states, thousands of communities, and scores of major cities near public highways and/or railways transporting highly radioactive irradiated nuclear fuel.
- On May 19, 2018, in Alexandria, VA, 30 freight cars of the CSX train came off the tracks and crashed to the ground below after a partial railway bridge collapse, according to the **Greater Alexandria Patch Newspaper**. Fortunately, the 167 car freight train was not carrying hazardous cargo.

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- Similarly, we have learned of accidents involving freight train car derailments in the Gallup vicinity reported by the Gallup Independent.

**The Consequences to Accident-Exposed Individuals and Entire Communities/Cities Must Be Analyzed**

- Terms like "collective dose risk" and "person-rem" are used to ignore the potential impacts to a single individual.
- Insurance companies do not cover nuclear accidents. Accepting high-level radioactive waste would expose taxpayers and property owners to an unacceptable level of risk and liability in case of an accident, which would bankrupt families and business. ELEA, a limited liability company owned by the cities of Carlsbad and Hobbs, and Eddy County and Lea County, does not have the financial capability of paying compensation to cover liabilities when radioactive waste spill accidents occur causing widespread radioactive contamination and long term adverse health and environmental impacts for individual victims and impacted communities.

**Cracked and Leaking Casks Must Be Addressed**

- The ER does not analyze exactly how radioactive waste from a cracked and leaking canister would be handled, since there is no wet pool or hot cell at the site.
- The Holtec HI-STORM CIS (Consolidated Interim Storage) System has major design flaws. Holtec proposes transporting aging thin-wall stainless steel canisters across the country and double stacking them in concrete steel lined holes. This is an experiment unproven below ground system that has not been approved by NRC.
- Each thin-wall canister contains about as much highly radioactive Cesium-137 as was released from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. There is no adequate plan to safely transport or store these "Chernobyl" canisters.
- Holtec President Dr. Kris Singh admits canisters cannot be inspected or repaired and states even a microscopic through-wall crack will release millions of curies of radionuclides into the environment.
- The Koeberg nuclear plant had a tank the NRC considers comparable to the thin-wall canisters. The tank leaked in 17 years with cracks deeper than most thin-wall canisters (0.61" vs 0.50").
- The above canister flaws apply to all thin-wall stainless steel canister systems.

**Destruction of Dairy and Agricultural Economy and Jobs in Southeastern New Mexico**

- Southeastern New Mexico is one of two major zones of the dairy industry, producing more than 75% of the milk volume of the state. Thousands of jobs and small businesses are dependent on the dairy sector in the area. According to 2015 New Mexico Agricultural Statistics, the number one cash commodity for New Mexico was in milk, followed by cattle and calves.

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- 70,000 acres of land in southeastern New Mexico are devoted to farms, ranches, livestock, field crops and vegetable growing. New Mexico crop and livestock production sales in 2015 totaled more than 3 billion dollars.
- The Holtec proposal to temporarily store high-level radioactive waste in a stop-gap experimental Consolidated Interim Storage site in this region of economically successful dairy and agricultural production will undermine and destroy the environmental health, safety and protection necessary for continuation of these sectors vital to New Mexico's economy. The public's trust in the safety of the products will be undermined by possible contamination of soil, water, and air from the radioactive storage site in the area.

**More Cumulative Impacts Must Be Analyzed**

- The ER mentions WIPP but does not analyze the impacts of a radiologic release from WIPP on the proposed CIS site.
- What are the projected effects on nuclear waste-filled canisters, partially buried in the ground, from rising temperature resulting from Climate Change in this region of New Mexico?

**Seismic Impacts On Stored Casks Must Be Stated**

- Although the ER gives a statement on recent seismic activity in the area, there is no analysis of what many 3.0 – 4.0 fracking induced earthquakes will have on the buried casks.

**Violations of Human Rights and Environmental Justice**

- In the process of deliberating Holtec's proposal, little attention has been given to moral, ethical, human rights and environmental justice principles that must be incorporated in every phase of deliberations.
- While the proposal gives attention to potential economic benefits for Holtec and other entities seeking profits from the nuclear accident-prone plan, all of the risks, dangers and consequences of transporting and storing highly lethal radioactive waste are shifted onto millions of people, thousands of local communities, urban centers, wildlife, land, soil and air when – not if – a catastrophic, dangerous radioactive waste accident occurs, resulting in a present day "Chernobyl."
- In this democratic nation, we believe that our God-given rights and covenant relationship with our Creator require us to be responsible to insure that moral, ethical and environmental justice principles be complied with by U.S. federal agencies. In the words of Pope Frances, in *On Care of Our Common Home*, "If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty toward nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith." (Laudato Si' 64)

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As we strive to be consistent with the values and ideals of our democratic nation, in a world witnessing increasing conflict and violence, we urge NRC to be cognizant of moral, ethical and environmental justice principles that need to be included in all deliberations and decisions related to permitting, licensing and regulations. As never before, we are challenged to uphold the value and dignity of every person's life, safeguarding and insuring health and wellbeing for all peoples, communities and the natural environment of our beautiful land, which sustains all life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rose Marie Cecchini".

Rose Marie Cecchini, MM, Ph.D.

Director