

CITIZENS AGAINST RADIOACTIVE DUMPING

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COMMENT ON PROPOSED RULES ON IMPORT AND EXPORT OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE (10 CFR Part 110 RIN 3150-AD36, Federal Register No.26, p. 4181, 4184, February 7, 1990)

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CITIZENS AGAINST RADIOACTIVE DUMPING (CARD) is actively involved with the education of citizens and government officials on the issues concerning the generation, storage and safe handling of radioactive waste. We wish to make the following comments on the proposed rules governing import and export of radioactive waste.

1. CARD agrees with the NRC determination that greater control and accountability over the import and export of radioactive waste needs to be established.

2. The disadvantages arising from denial of import of radwaste, (outlined by the NRC on p 4183 of the above referenced document), focus chiefly on the inability of domestic suppliers of sealed radiation sources used in medicine, agriculture, and industry to accept spent sources in exchange for new ones, thereby jeopardizing the global economic competitiveness of these suppliers. The regulation of this or other highly specialized needs of nuclear based technology manufacturers, can be established with a specific licensing and control framework (Option 3.) The contribution by such materials to the overall waste stream is negligible. Therefore it is completely without justification that this reasoning should be used to argue for importation of LLRW in general (NRC response, question 5), especially waste generated through the nuclear fuel cycle, which accounts for greater than 95% of LLRW activity.

3. As the NRC correctly realizes (response, question 6), local resistance to importation of radwaste will be extremely intense. We do not agree with the NRC premise that the siting processes currently in progress ensure against adverse effects on public health and safety. There is no "safe dose" for exposure to radiation - only "acceptable" risk. Risk assessments undergo ongoing revision (BEIR V) and new data appears continually (eg. Sellafield). The performance record for existing disposal sites demonstrates repeated failure while the performance of future sites is modeled on questionable assumptions and untested technologies. Increased motor transport of radwaste arising from importation can only increase the risk of radiation exposure to the public.

The NRC points out that site operators "are not likely to object to Importation of foreign wastes..... which could mean increased profits for the operator." Also not likely to object are domestic nuclear utilities, which stand to enjoy significant reductions in radwaste disposal costs due to economies of scale. In effect, the proposal to import radwaste

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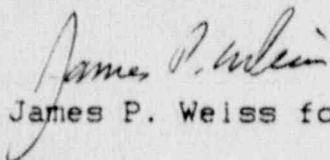
represents another subsidy to the nuclear power industry at the expense of public health and safety.

4. In the response to question 3 the NRC states, "Most developing countries have neither the technical expertise nor the regulatory structure to control adequately the disposal of radioactive waste." The Mexican incident involving exportation to the U.S. of cobalt-60 contaminated steel is cited as an example. This incident involved a medical source such as discussed in item #2 above, and illustrates the need to regulate this type of waste. However, to justify by this example the importation of all types of LLRW to the U.S. is (again) an argument totally without merit. Other than highly concentrated sealed sources, foreign medical waste can be stored for decay, or otherwise managed by methods within the technical abilities of the user. The operation, on the other hand, of nuclear power plants in countries that do not have the technical resources to manage utility generated radwaste is difficult to imagine and causes us to question the intelligence of the government which permits export of nuclear power plant technology to that underdeveloped country.

7. The NRC points out (p. 4182) that the proposed import/export rules will be consistent with the proposed policy to deregulate much of the domestic LLRW as Below Regulatory Concern (BRC). We view the BRC policy as a blatant example of "linguistic detoxification" and an unacceptable compromise of public health to serve the economic interests of nuclear utilities.

8. We are opposed to the exportation of American radioactive waste. Our toxic garbage should not be foisted upon an unknowing or unwilling people.

9. In summary, while we recognize the need to permit entry into the US of small amounts of very specialized forms of used radioactive materials as discussed in item #2, we view the NRC discussion of proposed import/export regulations as an attempt to blur the distinction between nuclear power plant radwaste, the bulk of all LLRW, and the small amounts contributed by medical, industrial, or agricultural LLRW sources. This is a ploy that has been used repeatedly by the utilities in their efforts to locate sites to dump their waste. It is impossible for the importation of such hazardous material not to increase the risk of adverse consequences to the populations in the vicinity of any facility that handles, processes, transports, or stores this waste. In its continuing efforts to protect the nuclear power industry, the NRC has perverted its mission to protect the health and safety of citizens living today and those yet to be born.



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