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50 Groups to NRC: Suspend Holtec High-Level Radioactive Waste CIS Proceeding, Till Covid-19 Emergency Ends

Coalition Calls for DEIS Public-Comment Meetings Along Targeted Transport Routes Outside New Mexico

Enunice, NM/Washington, D.C. -- A coalition of 50 environmental and environmental justice groups has written the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding Holtec International and Eddy-Lea Energy Alliance's proposed Consolidated Interim Storage Facility (CISF) for irradiated nuclear fuel targeting New Mexico. [See the letter, here.](#)

The coalition urges NRC to:

[I]ndefinitely extend, for the duration of the national COVID-19 pandemic emergency, the ongoing public comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Holtec CISF planned for development in Lea County, New Mexico. At the formal termination of the national emergency as declared by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), we request that the public comment period be extended for a period of 199 days. We further request that when in-person hearings again become possible that the NRC conduct plenary-style public hearings in 5 already proposed cities in New Mexico as well as in each of 18 other cities listed later in this letter.

The 199-day public comment period (as opposed to NRC's current 60-day public comment period, set to end on May 22, 2020), and 23 public comment meetings in a dozen states, would match the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) public comment proceeding at the DEIS phase of the proposed Yucca Mountain, Nevada permanent repository scheme, targeted at Western Shoshone Indian lands. Holtec's proposal is actually two-and-a-half times larger than the Yucca scheme: 173,600 metric tons of irradiated nuclear fuel, versus 70,000.

The coalition letter came five days after [the entire New Mexico U.S. congressional delegation wrote NRC](#), also urging public comment meetings across the Land of Enchantment be delayed until after the pandemic emergency ends, and the public comment period be held open until after the in-person meetings are completed.

Of the 50 groups on the letter, seven are from NM: Alliance for Environmental Strategies (AFES); Citizen Action New Mexico; Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety; Indigenous Rights Center; Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment (MASE); Nuclear Issues Study Group (NISG); and Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter. Of these, AFES, NISG, and Sierra Club have officially intervened against Holtec/ELEA'S CISF in the NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board proceeding.

Terry Lodge, an attorney based in Toledo, Ohio, represents seven grassroots environmental groups nationwide (Don't Waste Michigan, et al., including NISG), which have officially intervened in opposition to the CISF as well.

Regarding the coalition letter to NRC, Lodge said: *"The NRC's official position, that tens of thousands of extremely dangerous radioactive waste shipments are not even worth discussing in a scientific and public manner, is a dramatic red flag. There is zero justification to rush this ill-considered cash cow to licensing. The NRC must not be allowed to take advantage of the pandemic to ramrod a decision in the shadows."*

Rose Gardner of Alliance for Environmental Strategies in Eunice, NM said: *"NRC has set up some hearings in New Mexico for the public to comment on the Holtec DEIS, but unfortunately these dates come at a time when the whole nation, including New Mexico, is under stress and even dangerous conditions which do not allow for the common folk to even go to the grocery store or a doctor. NRC must stand down and postpone these hearings, as well as extend the comment period. The most vulnerable in our communities would be put at risk if these hearings were held now."*

Gardner added: *"I also admit that I am unable to concentrate on the dangers associated with the storage of high-level radioactive waste 35 miles from my home even though that should be an important thing to discuss as this could possibly impact the futures of all New Mexicans. NRC must take into account that these are not normal times and that regular communities are encountering abnormal situations every day that we never thought we would have to deal with. Living in the oil patch is especially difficult now because jobs are being lost and companies are pulling out of town at an amazing rate. I don't even know where we will be in two weeks as far as 'shelter at home' has been ordered by the New Mexico governor in order to help mitigate the dangerous contagious coronavirus pandemic."*

Coordinator of the NM-based organization Nuclear Issues Study Group, Leona Morgan, remarked: *"These are unprecedented times. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered massive disruption to our daily lives. All of us here in New Mexico have been ordered to shelter in place by Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham. We at the Nuclear Issues Study Group, a volunteer-grassroots organization in Albuquerque, echo the guidance issued by our governor regarding COVID-19 and support our Congressional delegation's urge to the NRC for an extension of the public comment period. Furthermore, WE DEMAND that the NRC: 1) Postpone all hearings re: CISF applications until it is safe to gather in large groups again, 2) Expand the hearings to include major cities along the likely routes, and 3) Leave the public comment period open until at least 180 days beyond all public hearing dates. These dangerous proposals for CIS facilities merit full participation by all impacted peoples. It would be unconscionable for the NRC to ramrod this process through during this pandemic! Without full public participation, this National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process would lack legitimacy and credibility."*

Wally Taylor, an attorney based in Cedar Rapids, IA, represents the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter's intervention opposing the CISF. Taylor said: *"The draft environmental impact statement for this project implicates so many issues and requires intense study, and probably expert review and opinions, that 60 days is clearly not enough time to submit the thorough and technically based comments that the NRC will require. Holtec and the NRC want to fast-track this process to prevent genuine public input. We will not allow that to happen."*

Molly Johnson, a member of the board of San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace (SLOMPF) in California, said: *"The proposal to transport high-level radioactive waste to a poor community of color in southeast New Mexico as a 'temporary' storage solution is dangerous and irrational. San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace advocates for storing waste at or as close as possible to the site of generation until a science based PERMANENT solution can be determined."* SLOMPF, a decades-long watchdog on the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, is also an official intervenor against the CISF, a member group of Don't Waste MI, et al.

Barbara Warren, Executive Director of Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), said: *"Multiple New York activists share serious concerns with our friends in New Mexico about the deficient environmental review for the long-term storage of nuclear waste that will be hazardous for millions of years. NRC has not required controls adequate to handle both short-term and long-term hazards for this dangerously radioactive irradiated nuclear fuel. In addition, there has been NO evaluation of the entire hazardous journey high-level nuclear waste will require, the enormous costs to fix transport infrastructure and the*

potential for disaster along the entire route, where freight and passenger trains must share rail lines. In addition, barge transport poses unique hazards. Hearings are also needed in Albany, Syracuse and Buffalo, New York." CEC is a member group along with Don't Waste Michigan, et. al, in the intervention against the CISF.

In its letter, the locations along major transport routes where the coalition urges NRC to hold public comment meetings include: Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Dallas/Fort Worth, TX; Detroit, MI; San Antonio, TX; Kansas City, MO; Miami, FL; Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; Nashville, TN; New York, NY/Newark, NJ; Omaha, NE; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; San Luis Obispo, CA; St. Louis, MO; and Tampa, FL.