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New Mexico communities respond to Nuclear Regulatory Commission license for Holtec

Despite New Mexico's recent passage of a law prohibiting the storage of high-level nuclear waste here, the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission on Tuesday issued a license to Holtec International to store the entirety of the nation's high-level nuclear waste in our state.

In response, community leaders and experts issued the following statements:

"This is a bad idea, full stop. Placing a nuclear storage facility in the heart of oil and gas operations is a recipe for ecological disaster and unnecessarily puts New Mexicans at risk. While I understand the need to store our nation's nuclear waste, the world's most active oil- and gas-producing field is not the right place. Holtec needs to understand that New Mexico is not the nation's dumping ground and should stop misleading the public about the dangers their proposal presents."

— New Mexico Commissioner of Public Lands Stephanie Garcia Richard

"Today's actions by the NRC illustrate the importance of New Mexico's new prohibition on the storage and disposal of high level nuclear waste. It's time that our voice be heard and honored, and that this project be shut down."

— SB53 sponsor and New Mexico Sen. Jeff Steinborn

"When the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is allowed to ignore the opposition from Gov. Lujan Grisham, the All-Pueblo Council of Governors, the state Environment Department, the Land Commissioner, our Congressional delegation, Tribal governments, and the Legislature, something is wrong. When a company like Holtec, with a lot of money, and not the best reputation for dealing with high-level nuclear waste in a transparent way, can come into New Mexico without consent and no permanent repository, it is unfair and just plain un-American. The possibility of our rails failing, or a terrorist attack threatening America's energy security, is very real. The fight to keep NM from being the dumping ground of the nation is not over!"

— New Mexico Rep. Debbie Sariñana

"The issuing of a license to Holtec by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to build a high-level nuclear waste storage site is an ill-conceived economic development project that ignores the high risk of displacing all or part of the existing dairy, farming, ranching, and recreational economy in the area. This revenue funds New Mexico schools, universities and preschool programs. We will continue fighting this ill-conceived project."

— Patricia Cardona, Policy Analyst, Southwest Alliance For A Safe Future (SAFE)

"As Indigenous Peoples, we cannot trust the feds to 'Do the Right Thing,' as they are failing us on what to do with this waste. New Mexico is saying enough is enough! Indigenous Peoples have been here since time immemorial, and we will continue to fight to protect our homelands for just as long."

— **Leona Morgan, Diné anti-nuclear activist and community organizer**

"It's time to say 'no' to a nuclear gateway to let toxic waste travel through tribal lands. We say 'no' to the past uranium mines that scar our landscape and contaminate our water. We say no to all nuclear waste that continues the trauma in health for our people. We say 'no' to Holtec's high-level nuclear waste that would've made more communities susceptible to this toxic-dump disaster. Protection is now, not when a spill, leak, derailment, or people are sick for many generations."

— **Ahtza Chavez, Executive Director, Naeva Education Project**

"New Mexico has proven that it does not support Holtec's endeavor to bring all of the nation's high-level nuclear waste to our homes by passing SB53 to prevent issuing of permits for temporary storage unless there is a permanent repository and the state consents to its construction."

— **Rose Gardner, Coordinator Alliance for Environmental Strategies**

"It is unfortunate that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is disregarding the State of New Mexico's position — backed by relevant case law and expressed in the enactment of Senate Bill 53 - that the proposed Holtec facility should not be located in New Mexico. The federal government has an obligation to create a permanent repository for nuclear waste before it forces states to become de facto permanent sites through an "interim" storage scheme."

— **Douglas Meikljohn, Advocate, Conservation Voters New Mexico**

"In 2006, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued a license for a similar storage site in Utah, over that state's strong objections. The opposition of Utahns stopped that site, and New Mexico's opposition will prevent the Holtec site from ever receiving nuclear waste."

— **Don Hancock, Director, Southwest Research and Information Center**

"With the approval of the Holtec facility, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission ignores environmental-justice principles, the will of the majority of New Mexicans, and the ethical duty to care for communities, lands and waters for the present and the future. New Mexico should not continue to be a sacrifice zone for the entire country."

— **Sr. Joan Brown, Executive Director, Interfaith Power and Light New Mexico and El Paso region**

"The risk of transporting high-level waste is much higher than the NRC has determined. Congress needs to identify sites for study of long-term disposal. Even at an accelerated schedule, it will take 20 years to create long-term disposal sites. New Mexico does not want to add to the monstrous risk we are already taking with the legacy of poor management of nuclear-fuel cycle waste."

— **John Buchser, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Nuclear Waste Chair**

"Our governor, state Land Commissioner, House and Senate have all said "no" to being the country's radioactive-waste dump. The federal government needs to follow its own law and identify and operate a permanent storage facility before making us the country's de facto nuclear-waste dump. Federal law is not optional. And communities that opted to host nuclear power plants got the energy, jobs and property taxes, but Holtec would allow them to export all the costs to the communities along the rail lines and in New Mexico."

— **Camilla Feibelman, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Director**

"With the passage of SB53 into law, the people of New Mexico have spoken: We are not a dumping ground for the nation's high-level nuclear waste. After seven decades of nuclear development and its accompanying devastating environmental and health impacts, the last thing New Mexico needs is another nuclear-waste dump. Holtec's dangerous plan is not welcome here. The NRC may issue a license, but SB53 represents the will and final say of the people."

— **Eileen O’Shaughnessy, Demand Nuclear Abolition**

“As Southeast New Mexicans continue to be a major fossil fuel provider for our country at the cost of our health and well being. We are now, once again, being tasked with storing the country’s nuclear waste. This time high level waste that will be stored above ground surrounded by oil & gas infrastructure. When is enough enough? It is nauseating that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is issuing this license despite the passage of SB53, and the horrific history of environmental injustice in our state. I often wonder how these people sleep at night.”

— **Kayley Shoup, Carlsbad, NM, resident**

“If this site opens, New Mexico could become home to the biggest concentration of radioactivity in the world. More than 95% of the radioactivity in all the nuclear power and weapons is in the rods now targeted for supposedly “interim” storage.”

— **Diane D’Arrigo, Nuclear Information and Resource Service**

“Neither the Department of Energy nor the NRC have allocated the money necessary to finding and establishing a safe, permanent, deep geological repository with the necessary safeguards for permanent storage. This makes New Mexico financially responsible for an inadequate de facto permanent high-level waste storage site. Environmental impacts of nuclear energy are historic and ongoing realities in New Mexico and the need to change the narrative is long overdue. Human environmental health as well as the environment in general should be focused on more than making monetary value on high level nuclear waste storage that has high level risk to both subjects when there are so many other ways to expand our rural economies in a healthy and sustainable way.”

— **Samantha Salazar, Center for Civic Policy**

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