

Nuclear Waste and Wisconsin Fact Sheet

Future generations must live with the decisions we make today about nuclear energy and its waste. The creation of nuclear weapons first created the issue of nuclear waste and disposal. Today, most nuclear waste is created by nuclear power plants. The federal government has the responsibility to ensure its safe disposal. Since the 1950's, burying nuclear waste deep underground has been considered the best method of disposal.

Throughout our 30+ year history, Clean Wisconsin has opposed the use of nuclear power because of the unavoidable risks to people and the environment. Our advocacy in the 1980s helped stop the construction of new nuclear plants in Wisconsin. Clean Wisconsin has continued to work toward clean, sustainable energy production in Wisconsin. Nuclear power is not clean or safe, and nuclear waste continues to threaten Wisconsin's way of life.

In 2002, President Bush approved Yucca Mountain, Nevada as the first major nuclear waste disposal site. Already, experts are worrying that one site will not be enough. Did you know Wisconsin could be home to the next site?

History

1980s:

- Policy makers decide there will be two disposal sites, one east and one west of the Mississippi;
- Wisconsin Radioactive Waste Review Board forms to inform and protect Wisconsin citizens;
- The Wolf River Batholith in northeastern Wisconsin is favored for a storage site; strong citizen opposition makes the site less desirable;
- Investigations begin at Yucca Mountain.



1990s:

- The Yucca Mountain project is delayed due to federal agencies and legislative discrepancies.

Today and the Future:

- President Bush approved Yucca Mountain in 2002 as the nation's first high level nuclear waste disposal site
- In 2007 the Department of Energy will release a report deciding whether another plant is needed
- The Bush Administration is calling for new nuclear power plants and longer lives for existing plants

What is the Wolf River Batholith?

The Wolf River Batholith is a large rock body (5,800 square miles) composed mostly of granite. The batholith lies in Langlade, Shawano, Waupaca, Menomonee, Portage, Marathon, and Oconto Counties and falls within the Fox-Wolf River Basin. A potential high-level radioactive waste facility would cover 636 square miles.

Could storing nuclear waste harm our health or environment?

Yes. Storing nuclear waste could endanger our streams, rivers and drinking water. It is most likely that contaminated waste could enter our environment through our groundwater. Normally granite prevents water from traveling because it is not porous.

However...

- The top 10-20 feet of the batholith are extremely weathered, allowing more water movement than usual;
- The Wolf River Batholith contains fractures up to 300 feet below the surface; these fractures provide excellent conduits for water movement;
- Studies have shown that water should be expected at depths up to 2,000 feet. The nuclear waste repository would only be 500 feet below the ground surface—less than two football fields away from our groundwater.

Groundwater movement in the granite could carry radioactive waste into our drinking water. Area groundwater flows east into the Wolf River, a pristine and popular trout river. Radioactive contaminated water would flow from the Wolf River into the Fox River, which connects to Lake Winnebago and Green Bay. Contaminated water from the Wolf River Batholith could eventually poison Lake Michigan. The EPA requires a minimum of 10,000 years before contaminated waste reaches a human environment, yet contaminated water from a Wisconsin storage site could reach our environment in as little as 3,000 years.

Transporting and storing radioactive waste puts Wisconsin at risk. In the summer of 2003, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Energy will be teaming up to design transportation routes to Yucca Mountain. The potential for shipping accidents threatens the safety of our communities. If a Wisconsin storage site was built waste would have to be trucked in from around the country through or near Madison, Milwaukee and Green Bay on the way to northeastern Wisconsin. A nuclear waste storage site is also an easy target for domestic or international terrorism. In these troubled times, it is just not worth the risk.



Wisconsin relies on tourism. Our clean water and special places create billions of dollars and thousands of jobs in Wisconsin. The threat of a nuclear disaster could cripple Wisconsin tourism, as well as hurt our health and environment.

Could Wisconsin be the next Yucca Mountain?

Yes. The Department of Energy created screening factors in order to eliminate unqualified sites. These screening variables include deep mines and quarries; population density; federal or state protected lands; and major groundwater discharge zones. **The Wolf River Batholith area contains most of these screening factors, but was *not* eliminated as a potentially acceptable site in the 1980s.**

The vote to open a waste storage facility at Yucca Mountain has emboldened the nuclear industry. President Bush already wants to extend the life of old nuclear plants but we already have more nuclear waste than we know what to do with. We need to look to better, safer options for power such as wind, solar, biomass and natural gas.

- **What can I do?**
- Contact your state representatives and your federal legislators and tell them that you don't want any more nuclear waste in our state. Tell your legislators to tell the Bush administration: No more nuclear waste in our communities! Let them know that you want clean, safe power for today and tomorrow. To contact your federal legislators, go to <http://www.senate.gov/> and <http://www.house.gov/>. To contact your state legislators, go to <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>. To contact Governor Jim Doyle, go to <http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/>.

