

Local Governments Support DOE Clarifying the Definition of High-Level Waste

ECA is encouraging stakeholders to provide input on the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Notice on its Interpretation of High-Level Radioactive Waste. In its Request for Public Comment, DOE outlines a potential modification in how defense high-level waste (HLW) may be defined. This would allow DOE to dispose of waste in accordance with its radiological characteristics and ability to meet appropriate disposal facility requirements rather than the waste's origin.

ECA supports the clarification of the definition of high-level waste. DOE will treat waste based on the waste's actual characteristic, rather than an arbitrary definition based on the waste's origin. ECA expects these changes will:

- Reduce years of DOE operations and risks to current host communities;
- Accelerate Hanford, Idaho, **West Valley** and Savannah River tank retrievals and closures – which decreases risk;
- Reduce the number, size and duration of storage facilities pending availability of a permanent deep geologic HLW repository (which has been delayed for decades); and
- Saves taxpayers \$40 billion or more on DOEEM's remaining lifecycle costs.

DOE's Notice is an important first step in pursuit of recommendations made by ECA in its 2017 report, "Waste Disposition: A New Approach to DOE's Waste Management Must Be Pursued," which examines how clarifying the interpretation of HLW may allow DOE to put into place a smarter, riskbased decision framework.

State regulatory input is critical for both sender and receiver sites prior to the movement of any of the waste. DOE's notice identifies that any changes to how waste is currently managed will still require compliance with the state agreements and performance objectives of a disposal facility as demonstrated through a performance assessment conducted in accordance with all applicable state and federal regulatory requirements.

"Most local governments support DOE clarifying the definition high-level waste at both sites where the waste is currently located and the potential receiver sites," says Ron Woody, ECA Chairman and County Executive for Roane County, TN.

“As the hosts, sender and receiver sites for the federal government’s HLW, we support DOE’s efforts to examine alternative disposal pathways for waste in our communities that, under the current interpretation based on artificial standards, can only go to a HLW repository. If DOE moves to more appropriately align disposal decisions based on actual risk, some of this waste may be safely managed as transuranic or low-level waste and can be moved out of our communities sooner while saving significant taxpayer dollars,” according to Rick McLeod, CEO of the Savannah River Site Community Reuse Organization.

“By beginning the evaluation of this alternative with a call for Public Comment, DOE is notably working to move beyond the old ‘Decide, Announce, Defend’ approach to policy-making. Allowing the people most directly impacted by DOE decisions to provide input early in the process, DOE can more fully understand the challenges and opportunities related to a shift in how this waste is characterized and build support. It could also bring the U.S. in line with how other countries around the world manage nuclear waste,” adds Pam Larsen, Executive Director of Hanford Communities.

“We are pleased with DOE’s effort to attempt clean up and clarify the definition of High Level Waste. Defining waste by its source rather than what it actually is, is an antiquated approach that strands waste at sites when safe disposal pathways are actually available. Disposal decreases the risk and eliminates billions of dollars in future costs associated with oversight of the millions of gallons of waste in storage tanks at our defense sites,” says John Heaton, Energy Coordinator for Carlsbad, New Mexico.

Any change in the HLW Interpretation will most directly affect how liquid reprocessing wastes stored in or removed from large underground tanks at DOE’s Savannah River Site in South Carolina, the Idaho Clean-up Project at the Idaho National Laboratory Site, at the Hanford Site in Washington State and at the **West Valley Demonstration Site in New York**, can be managed in the future.

During DOE’s 60-day comment period, ECA will co-host a roundtable discussion with other DOE stakeholders to consider DOE’s proposal and potential outcomes. The comment period ends on December 10, 2018.

A full copy of ECA’s Waste Disposition: A New Approach to DOE’s Waste Management Must Be Pursued can be found on our website at www.energyca.org/publications/.

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