

## Letter: Prioritize public health - not profit - in nuclear waste disposal

Posted Thursday, October 24, 2019 8:09 pm  
Editor of the Reformer,

Regarding the letter by K. Neutron, San Diego ("Nuclear waste can be dealt with safely," Oct. 19):

Nuclear advocates always seem to come up with grand ideas to "solve" the high-level nuclear waste problem but they always result in making more waste. Originally there was no waste problem because the waste would be reprocessed and used again in breeder reactors. The only reprocessing facility was **West Valley in upstate New York** and it shuttered after only five years because it contaminated the land and water around it. It remains a Superfund site to this day. Without reprocessing, nuclear fuel will remain in fuel pools and dry storage at reactor sites all over the country.

This magical idea that nuclear power created no waste ended when India tested a nuclear bomb in the 1970s leading to fears of nuclear proliferation. Because of the threat of proliferation, President Carter ended the research on reprocessing and breeder reactors.

Suddenly there was a "waste problem." Carter commissioned a study to determine the best way to deal with the waste. The level of naivety, arrogance and thoughtlessness is remarkable. Some of the ideas included sending the waste into space, but a rocket accident could contaminate the planet; placing the waste in a hole in Antarctica or Greenland ice and letting it melt down into the ocean bed was proffered but the waste could contaminate the ocean. Carter's commission finally settled on deep geological burial whether in a hole or a mine.

All this was codified under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA). Once established, an investigation began to determine the best dump site. Every state identified as potential for a waste repository threatened to sue. Instituting the NWPA was in crisis. The NWPA was amended; Congress stopped looking elsewhere and targeted Yucca Mountain, Nevada because Nevada had no political clout.

Now, with the failure of the federal government and the nuclear industry to establish Yucca Mountain as the national repository for nuclear waste, the industry, especially the corporations which are looking to make a profit from cleaning up reactor sites, need to get the high-level nuclear waste offsite to relieve themselves of the responsibility for onsite storage. It costs a lot to store the waste onsite — at least \$5 million out of pocket for NorthStar each year. This could sink NorthStar's profit-making plan and waste could remain onsite for decades if not centuries.

So in addition to naivety, arrogance and thoughtlessness, add profit.

Now that there's no permanent solution for the waste, they want to create "interim storage" dump sites in west Texas or New Mexico in working class, poor, Hispanic communities to make their waste problem

# Brattleboro Reformer

disappear. These sites don't have to meet the strict environmental standards that sunk Yucca — i.e., isolation from the environment for 1,000 years; isolation from groundwater for 10,000 years.

This initiative is a statement of the failure of the nuclear industry and the federal government to address the most toxic waste we have ever created. What is needed is a scientifically sound and environmentally just solution, not more magic or wish fulfillment.

A qualified "panel" must be established and funded to create the standards required to meet the health and safety of the public, not just the profit-driven, monetary bottom line of the nuclear industry.

Deb Katz, executive director

Citizens Awareness Network

Rowe, Mass., Oct. 21