

Las Vegas Review Journal

Texas company offers to take nuclear waste for interim storage

Feb. 9, 2015

By **STEVE TETREAULT**
STEPHENS WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON – A Dallas-based company is offering to store high-level used nuclear fuel at a site in West Texas until the government can find a place to permanently bury the highly radioactive waste.

Waste Control Specialists intends to apply for a license to build and operate a complex for nuclear reactor waste, company officials said Monday. WCS already accepts “low-level” nuclear waste from 36 states for disposal within a 14,000-acre site in rural Andrews County.

The company would set aside a portion of its installation for concrete pads on which spent fuel rods from up to 74 reactor sites would be consolidated and stored within hundreds of “dry cask” concrete and steel casks, according to WCS chief executive Bill Lindquist.

Lindquist said WCS expects to file an application with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission by April 2016, to win a license by the summer of 2019, and to accept waste by the end of 2020. The license would be for “interim storage,” for a period between 60 and 100 years.

In the meantime, state and county officials would work out a benefits package with the federal government for hosting the site, and then move applicable permissions through the state legislature, company officials said.

Finding a taker for the waste — even for the relative short term — would offer relief to the government which is paying billions of dollars in damages to utilities for failing to take the waste off their hands in 1998 as it once promised. The onetime plan to bury waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada already was more than 20 years behind schedule before it was terminated in 2010 by President Barack Obama.

Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz has estimated the government’s liability for failing to open a repository on time could be as much as \$23 billion over the next 50 years, assuming the government finds a solution by 2020. Some industry sources say it could end up closer to \$50 billion.

“We believe our interim storage proposal will provide an intermediate solution to a national problem,” said Rod Baltzer, WCS president. “Under the most optimistic scenario the United States still is decades away from having a permanent repository for this fuel.”

Congress may need to act before a deal can be consummated. In 2013 testimony to Congress, the Government Accountability Office said Department of Energy’s authority to arrange for interim storage have either expired or are unusable because federal law says work on a permanent repository must be underway before a site for interim storage can be operated.

Activists also have served notice they plan to protest the license application.

Transporting nuclear waste to Texas poses risks, said Diane D’Arrigo, radioactive waste project director at the Nuclear Information and Resource Service.

“WCS is really volunteering to make the U.S. nuclear problem worse by putting the deadliest radioactive waste from nuclear power on the same highways, railways and waterways we all use every day,” she said