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# Local cities asked to back spent nuclear fuel bill

Bill would allow the removal of fuel from San Onofre to temporary facility



By [Edward Sifuentes](#) | 9:48 a.m. Jan. 18, 2016

**OCEANSIDE** — Oceanside Councilman Jerry Kern is on a mission to garner support for a bill in Congress that would allow the transfer of spent nuclear fuel from the defunct San Onofre power plant to a proposed storage facility in Texas.

The bill, officially known as the Interim Consolidated Storage Act or H.R. 3643, was written by Rep. Michael Conaway, R-Texas, and cosponsored by Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Vista. It would allow the federal Department of Energy to take the spent fuel at San Onofre and other nuclear sites and put it in a temporary storage facility.

Under current law, the department can only remove the fuel if it's being moved to permanent facility, Kern said. A temporary storage facility is planned in western Texas to gather thousands of tons of spent nuclear fuel throughout the nation until a permanent storage facility can be built.

Kern, a member of the Community Engagement Panel for the decommissioning of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, said storing the plant's spent fuel on site is not a good idea. The plant is too close to the ocean and sits in an area prone to earthquakes, Kern said.

“This bill helps us get the fuel off of San Onofre and into an interim facility because San Onofre is not a good site,” Kern said.

Waste Control Specialists, which already operates two low-level radioactive waste storage facilities in West Texas, is planning to build a facility specifically designed to deal with spent-fuel caches at retired power plants such as San Onofre.

Environmental groups have raised questions about the the project's impact on nearby aquifers, and others say transferring nuclear waste from California to a relatively poor, rural community could be problematic in several ways.

Many North County leaders, however, seem to favor the move. Kern asked the Oceanside City Council earlier this month to vote on a resolution supporting the bill. The council unanimously approved the resolution and Kern is asking other cities to take similar steps.

On Wednesday, he spoke to the Encinitas City Council on the issue and the council asked its staff to draft a resolution for a vote later this month.

“I had requested that (a discussion on the spent nuclear fuel) be in an agenda months ago, so the delay is fortuitous because now we have some concrete action we can take,” said Encinitas Councilman Tony Kranz.

Kern said he plans to speak to other councils in the area, including Vista later this month. He spoke to the Carlsbad City Council on Tuesday but no action was taken at the time.

In October, the state Coastal Commission approved a controversial plan to bury San Onofre’s nuclear waste in concrete bunkers within 125 feet of a seawall and the beach at the shuttered plant.

The permit approved by the commission is only for 20 years, but critics worry that the steel casks packed with nuclear waste may linger at the site for generations to come, and might deteriorate to the point where they cannot be removed.

Nearly 60,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel is being stored at reactor sites across the United States indefinitely, Kern said. Another 2,000 tons of nuclear waste are being generated each year and there is no permanent storage facility in sight.

Plans for a permanent deep underground repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada have been shelved by the administration of President Barack Obama.

Until a permanent facility can be built, the temporary storage facility in Texas or another being proposed in New Mexico are good options, Kern said.

“It’s a more stable less hostile environment,” Kern said. “There’s no (sea) salt to corrode the storage tubes, no seismic activity and is less populated.”



[Edward Sifuentes](#)