



Nuclear Street News

Fri, Apr 29 2016

Waste Control Specialists Apply For Consolidated Storage Permit

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) said Thursday it had received the first of two expected applications for a consolidated spent fuel interim storage facility (CISF). The application came from Waste Control Specialists (WCS) with support from AREVA, the French engineering and nuclear power company said.



It involves expectations of a 40-year license for a consolidated storage facility in Andrews County, Texas, which would eventually hold 40,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel from commercial power plants. The depository, which would be an expansion of the 14,000 acre hazardous waste facility already there, would be operational by 2021, AREVA said.

The second application expected is to be filed by Holtec International. It involves a consolidated storage site slated for New Mexico. That application is expected Nov. 30, said NRC Director Mark Lombard at the Division of Spent Fuel Management in an on line posting.

Consolidating spent fuel, which is currently stored around the country, has long been a federal policy, but one without the infrastructure to make it happen. Since 1982, federal policy aimed at a repository for a final destination for highly radioactive waste with a centralized consolidation facility to be used on an interim basis. Since 1998, extensive studies of a final repository for spent fuel at Yucca Mountain in Nevada were undertaken, but by 2009 that option succumbed to political challenges.

Currently, says AREVA, there are 65 sites in 33 states where spent nuclear fuel is stored in concrete and steel storage modules. This waste is called "stranded fuel," by the Department of Energy, which is in charge of the nuclear waste problem, although the NRC has monitoring power over technical issues concerning spent fuel.

AREVA contends that storing the "robust above-ground modules" that can withstand tornadoes, earthquakes or flooding, makes sense, as they provide for easy loading and transportation and for access for monitoring and maintenance. The module systems are designed to store the spent fuel for 100 plus years.

There are many procedural steps required before an application is granted, however. The NRC will conduct two "parallel reviews," Lombard said. The first concerns safety and security. The second concerns potential environmental impacts.

Before those reviews start, the NRC will review the application itself to ensure it is of a high enough quality to go any further. The devil is in the details, which must be thorough and accurate. Once the application is deemed acceptable, a notice will be posted in the Federal Register. That will then allow for the safety and security and the environmental reviews to begin.

During the reviews, a public meeting to discuss the application will be held in close proximity to the potential facility. The NRC will also meet with WCS staff to go over questions and procedures.

“Once we get public and stakeholder input on the scope of our environmental review, we will conduct the review and document the results in a draft Environmental Impact Statement. We'll ask the public and stakeholders to comment on the draft. After considering those comments, we'll finalize it,” Lombard explained.

The process is expected take at least three years, “assuming WCS provides us with good information in a timely way during our review,” Lombard said.