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Public Interactions in the U.S. Department of Energy's Design of a Consent-Based Approach to Siting Used Nuclear Fuel Interim Storage Facilities and Associated Transportation Activities

Over the past several decades, the United States has generated used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste from the commercial production of nuclear energy and from defense related activities. These materials must be properly managed and eventually permanently disposed. The Secretary of Energy, in 2010, chartered the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) on America's Nuclear Future to recommend a new strategy for managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle. The BRC studied the issues for two years, received input through public meetings and a series of issue papers, and published its final report and recommendations in January, 2012. The BRC recommended an approach to site nuclear facilities that is consent-based, transparent, phased, adaptive, standards- and science-based, and governed by legally-binding agreements between the federal government and a jurisdiction willing to host such facilities.

In January, 2013, the Secretary of Energy issued the Administration's Strategy for the Management and Disposal of Used Nuclear Fuel and High-Level Radioactive Waste. The Strategy provides a framework for moving toward a sustainable program to develop an integrated system capable of transporting, storing, and disposing of used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste from civilian nuclear power generation, defense, national security and other activities. The Strategy endorsed the proposition that prospective host jurisdictions must be recognized as partners with the implementing organization. Public trust and confidence are prerequisites to the success of the overall effort, as is a program that remains stable over many decades. Therefore, public perceptions and concerns about spent nuclear fuel must be addressed regarding the program's ability to transport, store, and dispose of used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste in a manner that protects the public's health, safety and security, and the environment.

The Department of Energy (DOE) is undertaking activities within existing Congressional authorization to plan for the eventual transportation, storage, and disposal of used nuclear fuel. Key to implementing the Strategy is the recognition that success will depend on openness, transparency, fairness, inclusiveness, and trust-worthiness. Consistent with the need to move forward under existing authorization pending enactment of new legislation, DOE intends to engage interested state, Tribal, and local governments, other organizations, and the public in discussions about how to design and implement consent-based siting processes, with initial focus on an interim storage facility as a pilot project to remove used fuel from shutdown reactors.

Country/ int. organization

United States/Department of Energy

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