



PRESS RELEASE

ECA ASKS SECRETARY CHU TO REVIEW DEFENSE-RELATED HIGH-LEVEL WASTE AND SPENT FUEL STORAGE PRACTICES

NEWS MEDIA CONTACTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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May 3, 2011

WASHINGTON, DC – Energy Communities Alliance (ECA) has asked Secretary Chu to review the safety of defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel storage in light of the recent events in Japan and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's subsequent review of domestic nuclear power facilities and spent fuel storage practices. In a May 3 letter addressed to Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, Councilmember Robert Thompson, the Chairman of ECA, the organization of local governments adjacent to and impacted by Department of Energy (DOE) activities, requested that Secretary Chu review the safety and security of defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel storage, review the impacts on local communities of long term, defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel storage and analyze the cost and impact on cleanup budgets of storing and securing waste at DOE sites. ECA reminded Secretary Chu that safety and security issues must be regularly reviewed and addressed at DOE nuclear defense sites to ensure the health and safety of local communities.

Because DOE facilities and waste have no independent regulator, ECA asked Chu to review these issues and report the findings publically. ECA communities have been told by DOE that the storage of this waste is safe, and although the communities do not feel that the waste poses any immediate threat, ECA feels that a review of these issues would help to build trust among DOE, local communities and the public.

ECA is also concerned that using cleanup funding to store and secure defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel may prevent other essential cleanup activities from being completed. In light of the recent cuts to cleanup funding, ECA would like to know if these budget cuts will impact DOE's ability to manage defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel or prevent DOE from carrying out programs that help to ensure the safety and security of waste.

A copy of the letter can be found below. Please contact Allison Doman, ECA Deputy Director at 202-828-2423 with any questions.

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May 3, 2011

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20585

Subject: Department of Energy Should Review Defense-Related High-Level Waste and Spent Fuel Storage Practices

Dear Secretary Chu:

In light of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) review of the safety of our domestic nuclear power facilities, including a review of spent nuclear fuel storage practices and regulations, Energy Communities Alliance (ECA), the organization of local communities adjacent to and impacted by Department of Energy (DOE) facilities, asks DOE to review safety issues at DOE nuclear defense sites. The issue of defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel storage – if safety and security issues are not regularly reviewed and addressed – can have an impact on local communities, as we were reminded by the tragic incident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

Unlike private nuclear facilities, DOE has no independent regulator. ECA has been told by DOE that the storage of defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel are safe. While most communities do feel their waste does not pose any immediate threat, we ask that you review the safety and security of defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel storage and report your findings publicly. ECA feels that a review of these issues would help to build trust among DOE, local communities, and the public. As part of this review, we ask that you focus on how long-term, defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel storage would impact local communities.

We also ask that you analyze the cost and impact on cleanup budgets of storing and securing waste at DOE sites. The recent budget cuts to the office that is responsible for managing and overseeing the nation's defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel (DOE's Office of Environmental Management program) is concerning. Will these budget cuts impact DOE's ability to manage defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel or prevent DOE from carrying out programs that help to ensure the safety and security of defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel?

The costs associated with storing and securing this waste can be significant and the money to do so comes out of cleanup budgets. At Hanford and Savannah River, for example, facilities will need to be constructed to store vitrified waste that was originally destined for

Yucca Mountain. The waste also needs to be guarded for security reasons, adding additional costs. Using cleanup funding to store and secure the waste may prevent other essential cleanup activities from being completed.

ECA has previously communicated with DOE on this matter. In December 2009, ECA wrote you to request that the department 1) Engage local communities and governments on defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel decisions; and 2) Analyze the impact of DOE's decision to leave defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel in communities.

After DOE filed a request to suspend the Yucca Mountain license application in February 2010 – eliminating the expected final disposition path for defense-related high-level waste and spent fuel – ECA again asked that the department address these issues with local communities.

Please evaluate these important issues and report your findings to the public. If you have any questions, please contact me or Seth Kirshenber, Executive Director, at Energy Communities Alliance at 202-828-2494.

Sincerely,



Robert Thompson, Chair
Energy Communities Alliance,
Council member, Richland, WA

cc: Energy Communities Alliance Board of Directors
Deputy Secretary Poneman, DOE
Administrator Thomas D'Agostino, National Nuclear Security Administration
Assistant Secretary Inés Triay, Office of Environmental Management, DOE
Assistant Secretary Peter Lyons, Office of Nuclear Energy, DOE
National Governors Association
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Association of Attorneys General
State and Tribal Government Working Group
Environmental Council of the States
Senator Dianne Feinstein, Chair, Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee
Senator Lamar Alexander, Ranking Member, Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee
Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chair, House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee
Representative Peter Visclosky, Ranking Member, House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee
Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future