

January 20, 2000

To: United States Department of Energy
Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management
From: Jean C. Ponzi
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1 I am unequivocally opposed to the transport of radioactive waste from power plants, by rail and truck, through populated areas, across the U.S. to a storage site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

My community is unprepared to handle the kinds of emergency situations that can result from accidents or attacks during this transportation. This was clearly demonstrated by the fact that the Board of Alderman of the City of St. Louis, of which I am a legal resident, voted unanimously on February 6th, 1998 to approve a resolution completely opposing this transportation plan. I attended the meeting of the Board of Alderman at which this issue was presented and discussed. The City of St. Louis Resolution # 242 reads, in part:

WHEREAS, the City of St. Louis is without sufficient trained emergency personnel, equipment and financial resources to safeguard its residents in the event of a nuclear transport accident, and the shipment of nuclear waste materials through the City of St. Louis would therefore be a major risk...we are opposed to any federal or state legislation which would permit the transportation of high-level radioactive waste through the Metropolitan St. Louis area until such time as a deep-geologic repository has been sited, built and placed in operation for the permanent disposal of the nation's high-level radioactive waste."

The City of St. Louis is only one of thousands of communities across the US that recognizes its inability to deal with the hazardous potential consequences of 30 years worth of shipments of radioactive power-plant and other waste. We are not being squeamish about this, we are being dead realistic - and adamantly so.

I am an environmental educator professionally. I teach about resource conservation to elementary and secondary students, and their teachers, throughout the greater St. Louis area, and beyond. One of the subjects I have covered in-depth in this capacity is energy.

2 I am keenly aware of the financial pressures utility companies are dealing with as deregulation of their industry proceeds. I know full well that the storage of radioactive wastes produced at nuclear power plants all over this country - indeed around the world - is a cost burden utility companies are intent on fleeing. I know that utility companies are pressuring federal agencies, including but not limited to the Department of Energy, to take responsibility for their radioactive waste materials. I also know that the electric utility industry has long been directing its well-funded lobbyists to intensively pressure Congress to finalize federal assumption of responsibility for power plant wastes.

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Hence, this hearing today, as the plan moves forward to gather up hot and hazardous waste from multiple power plants owned by profitable private industries, and haul it through residential areas all over this country, at taxpayer expense, to a single site that taxpayers will then support in perpetuity. If there are accidents or attacks on trucks or trains carrying these materials along the way, local authorities – again at taxpayer expense – will be called upon to deal with situations they are in no way prepared to handle. Loss of life, health, property and environmental quality common to all Americans is not up for trade to appease utility companies and their stockholders.

As an environmental educator, I have also researched other issues relevant to this proposed plan to relocate utilities' radioactive waste from the many privately-owned and maintained sites where they have been produced for a profit. I do not believe the casks that have been designed for this transportation are safe. The proposed site in Nevada is earthquake-prone. Training to handle and monitoring of safety concerns involving the railroads and truck fleets that would be used are inadequate to the task. Will the US DOE hire and train a specialty truck fleet just for this job? Or will the contract(s) go, as is usually the case with government contracts, to the lowest bidder?

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(cont'd.)

Economics must not dictate a plan that has such tremendous, horrific potential effect on public safety, let alone environmental safety. Convenience and expediency are likewise ill-advised to determine the "disposal" of nuclear power plant wastes. The very fact that power plants are still generating these wastes, with the proportionately high cost of nuclear power generation (passed on to ratepayers) weighed against federal dollars spent to educate the public about the need to conserve energy – all of this is a wrong equation.

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Energy efficiency is important to preach and practice. It pays off. Perhaps, using demand-side management economics, it can pay back the investment of power companies to keep their wastes on-site, where facilities are already set up to contain and monitor them. I suggest that US power companies redirect their abundant lobbying dollars into research that might yield technologies to safely encapsulate the radioactive wastes already in existence, still at the sites where they were produced. If there is a penalty to be paid for generating and needing to manage these wastes, let the generators pay it. These costs must not be passed on to local safety authorities, into our health-care system, into the hands of train engineers and truck drivers, and into the lives of individual Americans.

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As a taxpayer, as a resident of a community located on multiple major rail and highway transportation routes that will likely be used in the DOE's proposed plan, as an individual who practices energy conservation in the first place, I say "NO" to this cross-country transportation plan. The DOE must stand up for Americans' rights, not for the profits of a few companies, by refusing to allow cross-country transportation of 2.3 million atom bombs worth of high-level radioactive materials. This plan is unacceptable to the City of St. Louis, of which I am an active, informed resident, and it is unacceptable to me.

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Also: Extend The
Public Comment Period!

Thank you!
Alan Choz

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