# For Awareness: CEP Member Consultation Meeting Follow-up Actions – Sharing Dan Stetson's Subcommittee Testimony and New York Times Article

**From:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Sent:** Thursday, May 2, 2024 1:05 PM
**To:** Dan Stetson; Victor Cabral; Victor Cabral; Martha McNicholas; Michelle Anderson; Mike Balsamo; Katrina Foley; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Marni Magda; Val Macedo; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Alyssa Napuri; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; John Gabbard; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz
**Cc:** Manuel Camargo
**Subject:** For Awareness: CEP Member Consultation Meeting Follow-up Actions - Sharing Dan Stetson's Subcommittee Testimony and New York Times Article

Dear CEP Members and Alternates,

Thank you for your participation in our April 30 CEP Member Consultation meeting. We appreciate your interest, sharing of information, questions, and feedback on future topics. We captured a list of actions including sharing Dan's testimony during the Energy, Climate, and Grid Security Subcommittee hearing: "American Nuclear Energy Expansion: Spent Fuel Policy and Innovation on April 20, 2024, in Washington, D.C. (see attached).

We also took an action to share the New York Times article below related to environmental groups cutting programs as funding shifts to climate change. The link and full article are provided below.

https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/08/us/environment-funding-nuclear-climate-change.html#:~:text=29-,Environmental%20Groups%20Cut%20Programs%20as%20Funding%20Shifts%20to%20Climate%20Change,focus%20on%20the%20climate%20crisis.

# *Environmental Groups Cut Programs as Funding Shifts to Climate Change*

The Natural Resources Defense Council is eliminating its longstanding program promoting nuclear safety and cleanup as donors focus on the climate crisis.




The crest of Yucca Mountain in Nevada, where plans for a nuclear waste dump were halted after years of litigation. Credit...John Locher/Associated Press

**By Ralph Vartabedian**

Nov. 8, 2023

A significant shift in donor contributions to nonprofits fighting climate change in recent years has left some of the nation's biggest environmental organizations facing critical shortfalls in programs on toxic chemicals, radioactive contamination and wildlife protection.

The Natural Resources Defense Council is shutting down its nuclear mission and has laid off its top lawyer in the field, Geoffrey Fettus, who led decades of litigation against the Energy Department to force radioactive waste cleanup and halt the creation of a nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

The NRDC is not alone. The Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife and the Environmental Working Group, which have been at the forefront of efforts to clean up waste water, regulate pesticides and adopt tougher standards for atomic power plants, are facing similar financial problems.

"Most environmental programs don't have significant toxics programs anymore," said Ken Cook, founder and president of the Environmental Working Group, which still devotes nearly half its budget to battling toxics in food, personal care items, cleaning products and water.

Meanwhile, global spending to fight climate change by environmental groups and other nonprofits reached $8 billion in 2021, most of it in the United States and Canada, according to a survey released in September by the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

Money has flowed into such groups as the ClimateWorks Foundation, which had revenues of $366 million in 2021. In its own report last week, ClimateWorks said that international funding from foundations for climate work had more than tripled since 2015.

Image



Ken Cook, founder and president of the Environmental Working Group.Credit...Jim Wilson/The New York Times

"Funders that had a nuclear program or a toxics program have left those fields entirely and have gone to climate change," said Marylia Kelley, senior adviser and former executive director of a citizens oversight group that has long challenged the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California on releases of radioactivity and national security issues.

Leaders of some legacy environmental groups largely agree that climate change, given its wide range of increasing global effects, is a top priority. But they warn that toxics in communities across the nation remain an immediate threat to human health and animal habitats. There is also concern about the growing acceptance of nuclear energy as a "clean" source of electricity.

Mr. Fettus, who declined to discuss his recent layoff, was regarded as a singular force in the fight to clean up nuclear waste sites in Washington, New Mexico and South Carolina, among other places.

"If there is no replacement, it will be a field day for the Department of Energy," said Tom Carpenter, former executive director of Hanford Challenge, which monitors the highly contaminated Hanford weapons site in Washington State.

The NRDC has spent decades filing lawsuits against the department to force it to do more comprehensive cleanups at Hanford and other nuclear sites, and push it to do the work more quickly. The federal government is seeking to renegotiate and possibly scale back some of the prior legal agreements reached, just as the NRDC steps off the field.

The environmental organization, which over the years has also filed lawsuits against other government agencies over issues such as water quality, wildlife protection and climate change, cut nearly 40 positions from its staff of 740.

It also eliminated its work on California water resources and antibiotics in agriculture, a spokesman said.

Similar financial woes hit Defenders of Wildlife this year, one of the nation's largest organizations working to protect and restore threatened species in North America.

That organization, founded in 1947, eliminated 22 staff positions, according to Defenders United, a union representing employees. A spokeswoman for the organization declined to comment, but union officials said on their website that managers cited an unsustainable budget deficit when they announced 14 layoffs in a "brief, last minute meeting with staff."
Image



A tank farm containing untreated radioactive waste at the Hanford nuclear site in Washington State.Credit...Mason Trinca for The New York Times

The funding shift to climate has been compounded by several other forces, including a $9 million drop in small-donor contributions, part of a decline in overall giving after the "Trump bump" when President Donald J. Trump was in office, said Phil Radford, chief strategic officer of the Sierra Club and the former head of Greenpeace.

Government stimulus payments during the coronavirus pandemic also had prompted some people to increase their charitable contributions, an effect that has dissipated over the past two years, several environmental groups said.

And there is an increasing tendency among younger donors, particularly those who ascend to control large family foundations, to consider climate change more urgent than other environmental threats, the groups said.

The Sierra Club warned last spring of a $40 million deficit if it did not cut costs. The club declined to disclose how many layoffs it conducted this year.

The "budget crisis" forced the club to consolidate programs and eliminate duplication, but it did not eliminate any of its missions, Mr. Radford said.

Meanwhile, the Sierra Club has increased its work on climate change since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, outpacing some of the club's other work. For climate, "There's increasing money out there," Mr. Radford said.

Within the larger community that monitors public policy, there is growing concern that priorities have become lopsided.

"It is good that we have all consolidated around the crisis of climate change — but at what cost?" said Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight, which has long monitored the country's secretive nuclear weapons complex and the toxic pollution they produced.

"Toxics are a foundation of the movement for open government. It all started with communities wanting to know about toxics in their environment," she said.

The shift in priorities is also reflected in government policy, with climate change winning the lion's share of some agencies' budget increases. The E.P.A.'s list of seven priorities in its five-year strategic plan begins with "tackle the climate crisis."

Image



Danielle Brian, the executive director and president of the Project On Government Oversight.Credit...Shuran Huang for The New York Times

The climate change issue has attracted support from a number of deep-pocketed billionaires, including Bill Gates, Michael Bloomberg and Jeff Bezos. There is also a growing clean energy industry, including solar, wind, battery and manufacturing ventures, all advocating progress on climate, said Kathryn Phillips, the Sierra Club's former director in California.

By contrast, she said, many environmental groups have been left to fight solo against powerful chemical companies and government agencies to force stricter regulations on toxic exposure and better cleanups.

The NRDC's president, Manish Bapna, said the organization was not withdrawing from its toxics work but "sharpening its portfolio," with an eye toward investing in issues where it could demonstrate significant impact, including climate change.

Those issues include lead in local drinking water, tailpipe emissions in trucks and contamination from trichloroethylene and polyfluorinated substances that are now ubiquitous in humans and animals, Mr. Bapna said.

Erik Olson, a lawyer for the group who handles water and toxics, said fund-raising for toxic contamination issues was difficult even before the growing alarm over climate change. "There has always been a challenge to do water and toxics. It has never been a well-funded area," he said.

In its nuclear work, the NRDC helped to fund and litigate many suits brought by local groups, such as Nuclear Watch New Mexico and Tri Valley CAREs in California, which monitor the Energy Department's two nuclear-weapons design labs.

"Clearly, it is a huge loss to have NRDC leave the field," said Jay Coghlan, executive director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico. "It was nearsighted. But youth is more interested in climate change. If you really want to see climate change, just wait to see what happens after a nuclear war."

Ed Chen, the NRDC's former federal communications director, said passage of the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, which provided large subsidies for electric vehicles and green power, signaled that the federal government was dramatically increasing its commitment to fighting climate change. He sees the NRDC's move as a "strategic pivot" to keep the organization in line with the shifting priorities.

The Biden administration has also proposed tight new regulations on emissions from vehicles and power plants. But some see the big boost in federal funding as a retreat from more direct regulatory systems for greenhouse gases.

"The Inflation Reduction Act is not the kind of environmental bill that we had in the past," said Mr. Cook, of the Environmental Working Group. "It is just a big spending bill."

The growing concern over climate change has touched off a slightly different debate in the environmental community: how to approach the issue of nuclear power.

There is increasing support among some environmental groups for commercial atomic power plants as an alternative to fossil fuels — which often comes with hefty donations from those concerned about climate change.

Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists, which has warned about the safety of nuclear power and the hazards of its waste, said environmental groups were "under an awful lot of pressure to adopt nuclear power without reservation."

Mr. Gates, the Microsoft founder, is now the chairman and largest investor in the nuclear power company TerraPower, which was founded to create what the company calls "safe, affordable and abundant carbon-free energy."

TerraPower's first 345-megawatt reactor — using uranium fuel enriched to a level about four times as high as traditional commercial reactors — is under construction in Wyoming at a cost of about $4 billion, said Jeff Navin, director of external affairs for the company and a former Energy Department chief of staff.

In the environmental community, Mr. Lyman said, Mr. Gates's entry into the debate "was a game changer."

And while Mr. Lyman's organization is not explicitly against nuclear power, he says it is not essential to fighting climate change. "It's more complicated," he said.

Regards,
*Lorraine Sandstrom*
Community Affairs and Relations, Senior Specialist
Community Engagement Panel (CEP) Management and Stakeholder Engagement (DA Complex -B )
Southern California Edison, San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)

**Attachment #1 – Dan Stetson's Testimony (See Appendix below). Direct links within article text above.**

## For Awareness: Recent Press on DOE Reaching First Step Critical Decision on Federal CIS

**From:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Sent:** Thursday, May 16, 2024 10:17 AM
**To:** Dan Stetson; Victor Cabral; Michelle Anderson; Mike Balsamo; Katrina Foley; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Marni Magda; Val Macedo; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Alyssa Napuri; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; John Gabbard; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz
**Cc:** Manuel Camargo
**Subject:** For Awareness: Recent Press on DOE Reaching First Step Critical Decision on Federal CIS

Dear CEP Members and Alternates,

I write to share recent press releases and video link regarding a first step critical decision-0 by DOE on federal consolidated interim storage.

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energy.gov

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Exchange Monitor Article:

**Conceptual design work can begin for federal interim storage facility after recent milestone**

A project to design a federally owned and operated interim storage facility for radioactive waste reached the milestone that marks the start of conceptual design work, the Department of Energy said Wednesday.

The Federal Consolidated Interim Storage Facility project "recently" reached the critical decision-0, or CD-0, milestone, DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy wrote Wednesday in a press release.

CD-0 is the point in DOE project management where the agency officially decides that a given project is the only way to fulfill a legal mandate.

"This milestone is more than just a procedural step; it is the first step in our strategic vision to meet our contractual commitments and advance the nation's nuclear energy infrastructure," said Paul Murray, deputy assistant secretary for Spent Fuel and High-Level Waste Disposition, in DOE's press release.

To accompany the presser, DOE released a new video, titled "What if we consolidated our spent nuclear fuel?" about its planned interim storage site.

According to the video, the eventual interim storage site will be able to hold roughly 15 metric tons of spent fuel. That is about 16% of the total inventory of spent nuclear fuel now stored near the power plants that burned it, according to DOE figures.

DOE legally cannot build or operate an interim storage site before it opens a permanent repository for spent nuclear fuel. Congress would have to change the law to allow an interim site to open first.

A DOE spokesperson did not immediately reply to questions about when the project reached CD-0 and when it might reach CD-1, the point in DOE project management where the agency roughs out a cost and schedule estimate that gets firmed up at the subsequent CD-2 milestone.

More on the "critical decision 0" by DOE:

DOE receives CD-0 approval for interim SNF storage facility



The Department of Energy has received initial approval, known as "Critical Decision-0" (CD-0), for siting a federal consolidated interim storage facility for commercial spent nuclear fuel. Paul Murray, deputy assistant secretary of energy within the DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy, confirmed to *Nuclear Newswire* that the DOE received CD-0 approval on May 6.

**The first of five milestones** the DOE uses for managing projects, CD-0 recognizes the fundamental need for the project, even if a specific facility or technology has yet to be chosen. With CD-0 approval, DOE teams can begin work on research and development, conceptual design, management plans, and cost and schedule estimates.

**Authorization from Congress is required** before the DOE can begin construction of an interim storage facility for commercial SNF.

Regards,
*Lorraine Sandstrom*
Community Affairs and Relations, Senior Specialist
Community Engagement Panel (CEP) Management and Stakeholder Engagement (DA Complex -B )
Southern California Edison, San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)

**No attachment. Direct links within text above.**
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## For Awareness: New Atlas Railcar Designed to Transport Spent Nuclear Fuel and Cleared for Operation

**From:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 12, 2024 2:53 PM
**To:** Dan Stetson; Victor Cabral; Martha McNicholas; Michelle Anderson; Michelle Anderson; Mike Balsamo; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Katrina Foley; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Val Macedo; Marni Magda; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Alyssa Napuri; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; John Gabbard; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz; Kelvin Barrios
**Cc:** Manuel Camargo
**Subject:** For Awareness: New Atlas Railcar Designed to Transport Spent Nuclear Fuel and Cleared for Operation

Dear CEP Members and Alternates,

I write to share the news about the new Atlas railcar designed to transport spent nuclear fuel. The Atlas is a 12-axle railcar designed by the U.S. Department of Energy to safely and securely transport shipments of spent nuclear fuel weighing up to 480,000 pounds.

Use the link below to check out the video.
New Railcar Designed to Transport Spent Nuclear Fuel Cleared for Operation | Department of Energy
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NUCLEAR MILESTONES

**June 4, 2024**

# New Railcar Designed to Transport Spent Nuclear Fuel Cleared for Operation



The Association of American Railroads (AAR) has certified the Atlas railcar system to operate on all major freight railroads in the United States.

The certification is the highest safety standard set by the AAR for transporting commercial spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste.

Atlas is a 12-axle railcar designed by the U.S. Department of Energy to safely and securely transport shipments of spent nuclear fuel weighing up to 480,000 pounds. The project took 10 years to complete and cost approximately $33 million dollars.

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This service is provided to you by the the U.S. Department of Energy. Visit the website at energy.gov.

Regards,

*Lorraine Sandstrom*
Community Affairs and Relations, Senior Specialist
Community Engagement Panel (CEP) Management and Stakeholder Engagement (DA Complex -B )
Southern California Edison, San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)

**No attachment. Direct links within text above.**
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# For Awareness: Water Leak from transported component from SONGS

**From:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Sent:** Monday, July 1, 2024 5:49 PM
**To:** Dan Stetson; Victor Cabral; Martha McNicholas; Michelle Anderson; Mike Balsamo; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Katrina Foley; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Val Macedo; Marni Magda; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Alyssa Napuri; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz
**Cc:** Manuel Camargo
**Subject:** For Awareness: Water leak from transported component from SONGS

Dear CEP Members and Alternates,
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There was a small water leak from a component while it was being transported from SONGS to a disposal facility in Clive, Utah. There is no threat to public health and safety due to this situation. There was a point at which it was thought that radiological contamination may have leaked from the component during transportation but we now have verified that is not the case.

The component left SONGS site on June 26 and water was discovered at 7:25 pm on June 30 while parked at the railyard in San Bernadino County. Since the start of the decommissioning project SONGS has safely made over 980 rail car shipments.

Additional details are below:

- We were notified that there was a small amount of water on a rail car that was transporting a component. The rail car was parked in a railyard in San Bernardino County.
- The component is called a Pressurizer, it is a large vessel that is 8 feet in diameter and 35 feet long and part of the reactor coolant system. During shipment it is not pressurized.
- This water appeared to be coming from the component at a rate of about one drop every two minutes, totaling about a pint.
- Radiological surveys from the SONGS team have determined that the water is below background radiation levels – in other words, the survey showed no detectable radioactivity.
- We are also coordinating with local officials for their awareness and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has been notified and updated that the water has no detectable levels of radioactivity.
- Since the water has no detectable levels of radioactivity, earlier reports on detections of Cobalt 60 radioactive isotopes were likely from the instrument's close proximity to the component, causing it to detect what is safely contained inside the component.
- In the meantime, we have stopped all shipments of waste from SONGS until we know more. An investigation and a recovery plan will be developed with necessary actions before waste shipments will resume.

Please contact us if you have any questions.

Thank you,
*Lorraine Sandstrom*
Community Affairs and Relations, Sr. Specialist
Community Engagement Panel (CEP) Management and Stakeholder Engagement (DA Complex-B )
Southern California Edison, San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)

**No attachment. Direct links within text above.**
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# For Awareness: Questions and SCE Responses Regarding Water Leak from the Transported Component from SONGS

**From:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 2, 2024 3:51 PM
**To:** Anderson, Michelle L
**Cc:** Daniel T. Stetson; Victor Cabral; Martha McNicholas; Mike Balsamo; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Katrina Foley; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Val Macedo; Marni Magda; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Napuri, Alyssa; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; John Gabbard; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz; Manuel Camargo; Julie Holt
**Subject:** RE: (External):Re: [EXTERNAL] For Awareness: Water leak from transported component from SONGS

Dear Michelle,

Your questions and our SCE responses are provided below.

1. **What route did the component traverse to get from the plant to San Bernardino?** The component traveled from SONGS to the Stuart Mesa Yard, and from Stuart Mesa to San Bernadino.

2. **What containment was the component shipped in?** The Unit 2 pressurizer was covered with a polymeric barrier system (PBS), a special blue paint which forms an impermeable barrier between hazardous or contaminated materials and the environment. It is used within the industry for shipping large components. With the PBS, the pressurizer is considered its own shipping package and was loaded onto a rail car for shipment. The Unit 3 pressurizer was also shipped a few days later and did not have any indications of a water leak.



**3) The phrase "May have leaked…. during transportation… verified that this is not the case." How was this verified? Was monitoring performed along the route and/or is there a need to do so (whether or not a regulatory requirement; to reassure the public and document liability/non-liability)?** Surveys performed by the team verified that the water that leaked from the component showed no detectable radioactivity. Radiological surveys also were performed for the pressurizer, rail car (area, side, beneath), and the ground beneath the rail car. In all cases radioactivity was not detectable. Since radioactivity was not detected by the surveys of the leak, there is no source of radiological contamination and thereby no need to survey the route.

Please contact us if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Regards,
*Lorraine Sandstrom*
Community Affairs and Relations, Sr. Specialist
Community Engagement Panel (CEP) Management and Stakeholder Engagement (DA Complex-B )
Southern California Edison, San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)

**From:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 2, 2024 6:11 AM
**To:** Anderson, Michelle L
**Cc:** Daniel T. Stetson; Victor Cabral; Martha McNicholas; Mike Balsamo; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Katrina Foley; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Val Macedo; Marni Magda; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Napuri, Alyssa; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; John Gabbard; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz; Manuel Camargo
**Subject:** RE: (External):Re: [EXTERNAL] For Awareness: Water leak from transported component from SONGS

Michelle,

Thank you for your email and questions. I will send a follow-up email with the answers as soon as I have the information.

Regards,
*Lorraine Sandstrom*
Community Affairs and Relations, Sr. Specialist
Community Engagement Panel (CEP) Management and Stakeholder Engagement (DA Complex-B )
Southern California Edison, San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)

**From:** Anderson, Michelle L
**Sent:** Monday, July 1, 2024 10:44 PM
**To:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Cc:** Daniel T. Stetson; Victor Cabral; Martha McNicholas; Mike Balsamo; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Katrina Foley; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Val Macedo; Marni Magda; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Napuri, Alyssa; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; John

Gabbard; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz; Manuel Camargo
**Subject:** (External):Re: [EXTERNAL] For Awareness: Water leak from transported component from SONGS

Hi Lorraine,
Thank you for this information. For myself, it demonstrates SCE's commitment to safety, transparency, and collaboration with locals. A couple of clarifying questions:
1) What route did the component traverse to get from the plant to San Bernardino?
2) What containment was the component shipped in?
3) The phrase "May have leaked…. during transportation… verified that this is not the case." How was this verified? Was monitoring performed along the route and/or is there a need to do so (whether or not a regulatory requirement; to reassure the public and document liability/non-liability)?

Thanks,
Michelle Anderson, CEM
County Emergency Manager
Director, Emergency Management Division
Orange County Sheriff's Department

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## For Awareness: OC Register Article – Progress on San Onofre's spent nuclear fuel made?

**From:** Lorraine Quinn Sandstrom
**Sent:** Monday, July 15, 2024 3:15 PM
**To:** Dan Stetson Victor Cabral; Martha McNicholas; Michelle Anderson; Mike Balsamo; Garry Brown; Jim Desmond; Katrina Foley; Rob Howard; Sam Jammal; Scott Kibbey; Val Macedo; Marni Magda; Michael Parham; Ted Quinn; John Taylor; Mel Vernon; Michael Villar; Alyssa Napuri; Mark Enmeier; Kristal Jabara; John Gabbard; Mike Sappingfield; Ken Schultz
**Cc:** Manuel Camargo
**Subject:** For Awareness: OC Register Article - Progress on San Onofre's spent nuclear fuel made?

Dear CEP Members and Alternates,

I write to share a recent article by Teri Sforza in the Orange County Register. The article is comprehensive and quotes Paul Murray/DOE extensively from our recent CEP meeting, as well as Dan Stetson, updates on the efforts by local, state, and federal officials to move the spent fuel offsite.

https://enewspaper.ocregister.com/infinity/article_popover_share.aspx?guid=e2f01be2-0ce3-4b63-a812-96e012f27dbe&share=true

ENVIRONMENT
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# Progress on San Onofre's spent nuclear fuel made?

Take a last look: Those iconic twin domes should be gone by mid-2027.

"Final backfill" at what was once San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station is slated for 2028.

And the highly radioactive spent fuel that has built up over so many decades — now encased in steel and concrete on a bluff over the blue Pacific — could begin exiting by 2040 to one of, say, five temporary storage sites.

"I hope I laid out a really simple vision for where we're going," said Paul Murray, the rock star of the recent SONGS Community Engagement Panel/Spent Fuel Solutions meeting. "Judge me on it. We have to make progress."

Murray has a divine British accent, a mechanical engineer's practicality and a mischievous twinkle in his eye. He was a bigwig in the nuclear industry for more than 40 years and is now the U.S. Department of Energy's new "Deputy Assistant Secretary for Spent Fuel and High Level Waste Disposition," bringing fresh energy and clear-eyed analysis to what has seemed a doomed and quixotic exercise: figuring out what to do with America's commercial nuclear waste.

Why, exactly, is the U.S. the only Western nation — besides Ukraine! — that has no permanent repository program underway, despite nearly 75 years lead time and billions spent on moribund Yucca Mountain?

"It wasn't a consent-based process," Murray said flatly. "We basically forced Nevada to take the repository."

Nevada doesn't have any nuclear power plants, and clearly, coercion doesn't work. Nations with repository programs underway worked hard to get consent from host communities, and the DOE's reborn effort is committed to doing the same.

"The only thing stopping us is public trust and political will to actually do it," he said.

Gaining the public trust is vital, he said, detailing "performance demonstrations" where waste canisters can crash into bridges, drop from on high, endure showers of dead chickens or whatever it takes to prove that they're "robust and nothing is going to happen" when the time to transport waste to disposal sites finally comes.

To that end, a canister from San Onofre was recently taken to Sandia National Labs, loaded with dummy fuel assemblies, then placed on the shaker table at UC San Diego — one of the two largest earthquake simulators in the world — and subjected to myriad quakes to test their soundness.

"It was a bit underwhelming," Murray said. "Nothing happened. But we will do this to help build public confidence that these systems are safe in an earthquake."

Dan Stetson, chair of the volunteer Community Engagement Panel, agreed.

"Yes, it was kind of boring," he said. "Which was good."

Paralysis on the waste disposal front is extremely expensive.

U.S. taxpayers, whether they've reaped the fruits of nuclear energy or not, are forking over more than $2 million every day to reimburse utilities for the costs of babysitting — er, we mean, storing — this spent fuel. That's some $800 million every single year.

Why are taxpayers on the hook? Because the federal government was contractually obligated to start picking up commercial nuclear waste for permanent disposal in 1998. Utility customers paid billions into the Nuclear Waste Fund to cover those costs. That fund has $47.7 billion and earned about $1.7 billion in interest last year, but the feds still haven't accepted an ounce of commercial fuel for permanent disposal.

Taxpayers stand to shell out another $35 billion to the utilities for storing this waste before an interim site (or sites) opens. Some say that liability could exceed $50 billion.

"The federal government has to take title to the fuel," Murray said. "The only way to stop that liability is to take title to the fuel."

Here at San Onofre, dry storage cost some $300 million to build and $20 million a year to run, Stetson said.

Murray has lots of ideas on how to muscle temporary storage forward.

There are 20 sites like San Onofre — shuttered reactors stuck with millions of pounds of highly radioactive waste. Might any be willing to host waste from other reactors until a permanent repository is built?

"I want to explore this option," he said. "It could save money overall."

U.S. industry is working on repositories with governments overseas. Murray wants to mine that expertise and bring it home.

And why, he wonders, does everyone look past America's one and only deep geologic repository, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico? It's been operating for 25 years, disposing of waste from the Department of Energy's nuclear weapons programs, in salt beds thousands of feet below the earth's crust.

"How can my program collaborate?" he asked.

(Murray didn't mention the two accidents at WIPP in 2014 that shut the program down for three years, but lessons have allegedly been learned and there hasn't been much drama there over the past decade.)

Anyway, the DOE's consent-based siting consortia is in the "planning and capacity building" stage right now, trying to earn the trust of local communities and encouraging "mutual learning" and understanding of how nuclear waste management works. That's slated to wrap up next year.

It will be followed by the "site screening and assessment" stage, where DOE examines potential sites hand in hand with those communities (figure another 4-7 years here), wrapping up with the final "negotiation and implementation" stage, where agreements are struck with "willing and informed host communities, with licensing, construction and operation activities to follow" (another 4-5 years).

Keep in mind that this push for temporary storage is just a stopgap until a deep geologic disposal site (or sites) is built. It will require Congress to make changes to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act to allow money to be spent on the effort, and Murray insists that the U.S. must have a dedicated office for nuclear waste disposal — and serious funding — to keep the process on track over what will literally be hundreds of years of work.

If temporary storage opens in 2040, and the oldest fuel is moved first from the nation's reactors, it will take some 50 years before it's all there. Expect a half-century to get a permanent repository open, and 100 years until it closes. That puts us at about 2300.

"This is a multigenerational project," he said. "Slow but steady progress to build public and political trust. … Strong engagement with tribal representatives. … A simple vision everyone can understand. We're moving, we're making progress. Everyone can see it."

It's with cautious optimism we note that things do seem to be moving forward.

The U.S. House Subcommittee on Energy, Climate and Grid Security held a hearing on "American Nuclear Energy Expansion; Spent Fuel Policy and Innovation" in the spring. Stetson was there, testifying about the importance of interim storage because it can get waste moved off-site decades earlier than deep geologic repositories. San Onofre, of course, is in an earthquake zone close to some 10 million people; not an ideal place to store nuclear waste.

"I was really surprised and felt good after the meeting," Stetson said. "The amount of bipartisan engagement really surprised me and warmed my heart. I left feeling very optimistic."

Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley and San Diego County Supervisor Jim Desmond recently trouped to Washington to stress the urgency of dealing with the nuclear waste conundrum upon congressional leaders and other federal officials. In Sacramento, Joint Resolution 18 was introduced in May by Assemblymember Laurie Davies, R-Laguna Niguel, and Sen. Catherine Blakespear, D-Encinitas, urging Congress "to prioritize fulfilling the federal government's legal and contractual obligation to provide a home for spent nuclear fuel within California and 33 other states across the nation."

U.S. Rep. Mike Levin, D-San Juan Capistrano, has made the issue a priority since arriving in Congress, helping forge a bipartisan caucus on the issue and shepherd through the funding to restart the consent-based siting initiative.

"I want to be clear-eyed," he said. "It took years to make this mess, and it will take years to fix it."

On July 1, the DOE issued a request for information "to identify industry partners interested in contributing to the development of federal consolidated interim storage facilities for the management of spent nuclear fuel. DOE is also seeking information from parties interested in providing engineering design, project management, integration, and other services needed to build and manage consolidated interim storage facilities." Folks must submit responses by Sept. 5.

That feedback will inform a competitive request for proposals for the engineering design of an actual, real federal consolidated interim storage facility.

"While it may appear to be glacially slow," Stetson said, "we are making progress."

Best,
*Lorraine Sandstrom*
Community Affairs and Relations, Sr. Specialist
Community Engagement Panel (CEP) Management and Stakeholder Engagement (DA Complex-B)
Southern California Edison, San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS)

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## Appendix of Attachments Below
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**Congressional Hearing – April 10, 2024**
**Subcommittee on Energy, Climate and Grid Security**
**House Committee on Energy and Commerce**
**Representative Jeff Duncan, Subcommittee Chairman**
**Representative Diana DeGette, Ranking Member**

**Daniel Stetson, Chairman**
**San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station Community Engagement Panel**

Good morning, Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member DeGette, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for your service to the American people and for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Daniel Stetson; I am the President Emeritus of the Ocean Institute in Dana Point, California, where I worked for 23 years. I am here today in my role as Chairman of the Community Engagement Panel[1] (CEP) for the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS) — which sits on a beautiful stretch of the Southern California coast.

I was invited as a representative of the communities in the vicinity of a retired nuclear plant — SONGS — and to share what I have learned from listening to the communities' concerns, as a volunteer member of the CEP, for more than ten years. The CEP is composed of a broad range of stakeholders, from business and organized labor to tribal leaders, environmental groups, and local elected officials. The CEP serves as an interface between the communities around SONGS and its decommissioning agent, Southern California Edison.

[1] www.SONGScommunity.com

I also have worked with representatives of Spent Fuel Solutions[2], a coalition that grew out of the communities around SONGS. It's a diverse coalition with 250-plus members that advocates for the federal government and you, our Congressional leaders, to make offsite storage and disposal a reality.

For people in the communities around SONGS, a top area of interest is spent fuel. That is both the safe onsite storage of spent fuel, and the prompt relocation of spent fuel to an offsite, federally licensed facility.

It is no secret that the US spent fuel management program is a failure. And it should be no surprise that the trust of the affected communities has been shattered. We are deeply frustrated. The governing federal legislation was last amended 37 long years ago.

That failure is costly, in many ways.

First, nuclear utility customers have a deal with the government. Simply stated, nuclear power customers paid a fee for the disposal of spent fuel. We did our part and, today, $46 billion sits in the Nuclear Waste Fund. In return, the US Department of Energy was to start picking up spent fuel from commercial nuclear plants like SONGS in 1998. That never happened.

[2] www.SpentFuelSolutionsNow.com

Second, ongoing failure has a high price tag. Due to inaction over many years, onsite, at-reactor storage of spent fuel has cost US taxpayers more than $10 billion to date and is growing at $2 million per day with no end in sight. And, all taxpayers cover those costs, whether or not they ever received one kilowatt of nuclear power.

Third is generational equity. As we continue to kick the can down the road, we burden future generations with solving the problem.

Fourth, communities around SONGS — like others in the vicinity of reactor sites across the US — never consented to hosting spent fuel storage for the long-term. SONGS decommissioning is ongoing, with all spent fuel now in dry cask storage. By 2030, all the fuel at SONGS will qualify for transportation to a federal storage or disposal facility. Additionally, SONGS is situated on land owned by the US Navy, and clearing the site of spent fuel will allow for completion of the decommissioning process, for the land to be restored, and the site returned to the Navy to support its national defense mission of training Marines at Camp Pendleton.

And finally, if we as a nation are to leverage next-generation nuclear reactors to help address our growing energy needs and climate change, we must address the back end of the fuel cycle.

Spent fuel can be safely stored at reactor sites for decades. But eventually, spent fuel must be permanently isolated from the biosphere. There is international consensus on how to dispose of spent nuclear fuel — in deep geologic repositories (DGRs). Here in the US, the problem is not an engineering or scientific one. The real problem is a sociopolitical one, and that is where to dispose of spent fuel.

Fixing the spent fuel problem means fixing federal law. We can learn from our failures as well as from best practices in countries such as Finland, Canada, and others.

Last spring, I joined more than two dozen stakeholders from across the country — from California to Maine — to discuss how best to amend the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA) and create a more durable and integrated spent fuel program that includes both near-term interim storage and, in the long term, permanent disposal. The result of our deliberations were six policy principles. These are, in priority order:

1. forming a single-purpose federal organization to assume management of the spent fuel program from DOE;
2. reliable and adequate funding;
3. prompt pursuit of multiple permanent DGRs;
4. revisiting the linkage between consolidated interim storage (CIS) — referred to as "monitored retrieval storage" in the NWPA — and permanent disposal;
5. expanding the application of federal title to and liability for spent fuel to include private CIS; and

6. transportation planning including a public information program and emergency preparedness.

DOE already is authorized to pursue CIS and, at present, is doing so through a consent-based siting process. Let me emphasize that I have heard loud and clear that CIS is monumentally important to the communities around SONGS. Even under the most optimistic timeframes, at-grade CIS facilities can provide for clearing spent fuel from reactor sites literally decades earlier than DGRs. And a healthy repository program is essential for giving potential CIS host communities confidence that interim will not become permanent by default.

Finally, I think it is important to highlight a few points regarding consent-based siting, Yucca Mountain, and reprocessing.

International best practices illustrate that consent-based siting is the most reliable approach to siting spent fuel disposal facilities. I appreciate that the DOE is using a consent-based approach to siting federal CIS facilities. Fundamental to the success of consent-based siting is building enduring trust: a partnership between potential host communities and the implementing federal organization. This must be built over time with demonstrated competence, stability, and adaptability to meet the needs of each individual candidate community as well as state acceptance. This must include Native American tribal nations, as appropriate. Successful programs show us this is best done by a single-

purpose organization with the ability and resources to adapt to changing circumstances over time. Said differently, because of the decades-long process associated with DGRs in particular, the implementing organization must have the continuity to span changes in Administrations and shifting political winds.

With respect to Yucca Mountain, I am neither for nor against it. Rather, in the spirit of consent-based siting, federal legislation should not pre-determine sites for DGRs. We should be open to any community that is informed and interested in volunteering.

With respect to reprocessing, we need to be eyes-wide-open and recognize that independent of decisions on reprocessing, providing for permanent disposal is a must.

In closing, let me state that I am optimistic and encouraged. I am encouraged that the DOE is working on federal CIS — addressing at least part of the problem. I am encouraged that Finland will open the world's first DGR later this year. And I am greatly encouraged that this Congressional Subcommittee is talking about the spent fuel problem and highly optimistic that you will soon be working on real solutions! Solutions that deliver on what your constituents want: the near-term relocation of spent fuel to federal CIS facilities.

Thank you for your attention.