Finding a Way Forward For Nuclear Waste Disposal

Geoffrey Fettus, Senior Attorney, NRDC
Nuclear Waste Lasts Forever

Consensus elements of national solutions to this everlasting challenge:

- Repositories
- Federal Assumption of Nuclear Industry’s Burden
Southern California Faces Nuclear Waste Challenges
A Long Hunt for Solutions

Failed Efforts at Siting or Developing …

Repositories
Interim Storage Sites
Reprocessing Spent Fuel
What Usually Happens ...
We recognize that defining a meaningful and appropriate role for states, tribes, and local governments under current law is far from straightforward, given that the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 provides for exclusive federal jurisdiction over many radioactive waste management issues … Nevertheless, we believe it will be essential to affirm a role for states, tribes, and local governments that is at once positive, proactive, and substantively meaningful and thereby reduces rather than increases the potential for conflict, confusion, and delay.” Final Report at 56.
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets basic environmental, public health standards for air, land, water and waste pollution.

States can obtain “delegated” authority to implement those standards.

EPA retains oversight and enforcement authority.

Delegated states can impose stricter requirements, different regulatory mandates.

Nuclear waste should be no different, but under the Atomic Energy Act and the Nuclear Waste Disposal Act, it is.
NRDC’s Way Forward

Apply our longstanding environmental laws to nuclear waste!

Remove the nuclear waste exemptions from environmental law and …

Allow EPA and delegated states to set standards and exert regulatory control over nuclear waste facilities under revised hazardous waste laws.
NRDC’s Goal?

- Our goal has been, and remains, the siting of geologic repositories that are scientifically defensible & publicly accepted.

- The last 60 years of nuclear waste history have been an object lesson in attempts to exert power over the (statutorily defined) powerless, and it’s failed each time.

- If we allow environmental laws to work, EPA & the States can start to make technically sound & publicly supported solutions.
Thanks for your attention.