

Traffic Big Concern As Sunny Point Eyed To Receive Spent Nuclear Fuel

BY SUSAN USHER

It was no surprise to U.S. Department of Energy officials last week when a group of Brunswick County residents, town and county officials said they don't want Sunny Point to receive spent nuclear fuel from abroad.

"Visit our seafood restaurants," invited Calabash Commissioner Al Leisey, "but leave that other stuff where it is."

That's the same answer the agency has received at every turn. "Everyone says they understand the importance of doing this, but says 'not in my back yard,'" said Dave Huizenga, the DOE engineer in charge of the spent fuel program.

"People have been telling us why don't you find a low-density port close to the Savannah River site with the capability to receive it and bring it there. That's why we went to Sunny Point. That's the direction environmental groups are telling us to go."

Spent fuel is used fuel that can no longer produce energy effectively and must be replaced with fresh fuel. The DOE proposes transporting the fuel elements to its Savannah River nuclear site in Aiken, S.C., for temporary storage.

Sunny Point is the largest ammunition depot in the free world. Its port facilities on the Cape Fear River are isolated, surrounded by a large buffer area, with rail service and road access. DOE says fuel shipments could be timed to avoid contact with ammunition movement, a major concern noted by 7th District Congressman Charlie Rose.

Rose is opposing importation of radioactive materials through Wilmington or Sunny Point, saying they cannot "safely and adequately handle such volatile material."

Huizenga said the fuel being shipped is the uranium isotope U-235, the type fuel used by the Brunswick Nuclear Plant. "It's the same amount of badness."

Commissioner Wayland Vereen was concerned about shipments coming through Brunswick County during tourist season, when local roadways are clogged.

"It's up to the shippers," replied Huizenga. "They have to get fuel out soon or shut down. You have vacationers coming."

"Traffic is the biggest concern you're going to have. It's the perception you're dealing with," advised Mark Stewart, mayor of Boiling Spring Lakes, the town closest to Sunny Point. "The risk is much less by rail."

Carolina Power & Light Co. periodically ships spent fuel from its Brunswick Nuclear Plant on the U.S. Army's rail line (which originates at Sunny Point) through Boiling Spring Lakes.

Several other Boiling Spring Lakes residents agreed they would worry less about the possibility of an accident if the fuel were transported by rail rather than truck but they would rather not worry at all.

"I'm hearing rail and guarded," said Huizenga, summarizing comments.

"You're actually hearing us say we don't want it here," Suzanne Osborne reiterated.

Does DOE plan to inspect the shipments for damage or leaks before off-loading?" asked Stewart.

"If that's what it's going to take to make people more comfortable," said Huizenga.

"Tell them if they're going to come in here we'd be more comfortable if it came in by rail," said Vereen.

If desired, said Judy Holm, who is handling transportation arrange-

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—Al Leisey

ments, special training could be provided to local emergency personnel.

Longshoremen's representative Willie Sloan told the DOE representatives that union locals are qualified and willing to unload the fuel.

"We're not telling you to bring it here," said Sloan, "but if you bring it here we can handle it. We do have the training and we're handling it right now."

This is the first time DOE has considered using a military port or rail transport when arranging spent fuel shipments, mainly because it is costlier.

Those earlier shipments occurred before DOE was forced to discuss its plans with the public. Spent fuel went through the state port in Wilmington between 1984 and 1986, DOE officials said, and local officials apparently knew nothing of it.

In 1988 the Sierra Club sued DOE regarding plans to accept spent fuel from Taiwan through a port in Virginia. Instead of settling the legal issue, the government stopped the shipments and let the return program lapse, said Ed Fei, a DOE official whose concern is nuclear weapon

non-proliferation.

Huizenga said this administration is attempting to restore the spent fuel return program, part of an international effort to take bomb-quality uranium out of circulation. Under its terms, the United States agreed to take back spent fuels of highly-enriched uranium it had leased or sold to foreign research reactors in exchange for those reactors agreeing to switch to a less efficient fuel with a much lower percentage of uranium.

The reactors are running out of storage. Some face shut down by government regulators if they cannot dispose of spent fuel. Others are considering reprocessing fuel and possibly switching back to highly-enriched fuel purchased from sources such as Russia and China.

While an environmental impact statement is prepared on the expected return of 15,000 elements over a period of 15 to 20 years, DOE wants to provide short-term "urgent relief" to operators by taking these 448 elements.

"They feel their backs are against

the wall," Huizenga said. "We're asking people to understand the importance of bringing these back."

The United States isn't considering reprocessing as an alternative to storage since this country has stopped reprocessing uranium fuels and is encouraging other countries to do so, said Fei.

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Years at Present Address					
Under 2 yrs	2-4 yrs	5-8 yrs	9-14 yrs	15 yrs or more	
1	2	3	4	5	
Gross Monthly Income					
\$1,000	\$1,001	\$2,001	\$2,001	Over \$3,000	
3	4	5	6	7	
Years With Present Employer					
Under 2 yrs	2-3 yrs	4-6 yrs	7-10 yrs	Over 10 yrs	
1	3	4	5	6	
Years With Previous Employer					
Under 1 yr	1-3 yrs	4-6 yrs	7-10 yrs	Over 10 yrs	
0	1	2	4	5	
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