

Clean Wisconsin

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Wisconsin: The Next Yucca Mountain?

Bill to Repeal Nuclear Law May Open Door to Wolf River National Radioactive Waste Storage Site

Madison, Wis. – A recently introduced bill designed to ease restrictions preventing the construction of new nuclear power plants in Wisconsin is causing great environmental and economic concern among state residents. By opening the door to new and expensive nuclear plants, Wisconsin legislators could help federal policy-makers declare the state a national radioactive disposal site in the wake of recently pulled funding from the originally planned Yucca Mountain site in Nevada.

“Few Wisconsinites realize that the headwaters of the beautiful Wolf River in Northern Wisconsin is viewed by federal scientists as one of the best potential sites geologically for storing nuclear waste, and nears the top of the list as a potential national radioactive waste repository,” said Katie Nekola, energy program director at Clean Wisconsin, the state’s largest environmental advocacy organization. “With federal policy-makers recently pulling the plug on Yucca Mountain as a national nuclear waste repository, they are now eyeing new sites to store the nation’s dangerous nuclear waste. Lifting restrictions in Wisconsin that currently prevent the construction of nuclear power plants could give federal lawmakers the political impetus they need to declare Wisconsin the next Yucca Mountain”

While it’s dubbed the “nuclear moratorium law,” Wisconsin’s current law does not strictly prohibit the construction of nuclear power plants. Instead, it requires that any new nuclear power facility is proven to be economical for ratepayers and that a permanent waste storage site is available to safely store spent nuclear fuel.

The proposed repeal bill (Senate Bill 340/Assembly Bill 516) would amend the existing law to remove the conditions requiring any new facility to demonstrate it is economically advantageous to ratepayers and that a facility with sufficient capacity to store spent nuclear waste exists.

“The requirement that new nuclear plants don’t break the bank is especially critical in times like these, when utility customers have a hard time paying their bills already,” said Nekola. “This is especially true when one considers that nuclear energy is one of the most expensive forms of energy production around today.”

New nuclear plants represent an expensive proposition for ratepayers. In 2008, reactor construction costs were in the \$6 billion to \$12 billion range, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates that half of all loans to nuclear projects default.

Beyond concerns over the cost of nuclear power and the safety of storing toxic radioactive waste produced at Wisconsin facilities, many are concerned about the risk of Wisconsin becoming the destination for the rest of the nation’s nuclear waste.

“If Wisconsin repeals its limitations on new nuclear reactors, it will send a strong signal that we aren’t concerned about storing radioactive waste here,” said Nekola. “There’s a very real possibility that northern Wisconsin could become the next Yucca Mountain, and we can’t afford the cost and risk of being a national radioactive waste dump.”

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Clean Wisconsin, an environmental advocacy organization, protects Wisconsin's clean water and air and advocates for clean energy by being an effective voice in the state legislature and by holding elected officials and polluters accountable. Founded in 1970 as Wisconsin's Environmental Decade, Clean Wisconsin exposes corporate polluters, makes sure existing environmental laws are enforced, and educates citizens and businesses. On behalf of its 10,000 members and its coalition partners, Clean Wisconsin protects the special places that make Wisconsin such a wonderful place to live, work and play. Phone: 608-251-7020, Fax: 608-251-1655, Email: information@cleanwisconsin.org, Website: www.cleanwisconsin.org.