

Nuclear Power & Weapons Waste In Everyday Household Items & Landfills

Prevent Radioactive Waste from Entering the Marketplace & Trash



If our federal government has its way, radioactive materials will soon find their way onto store shelves and into our homes and workplaces with no warning or labeling. Radioactive waste from nuclear power and weapons could be “recycled” into everyday household items like toys, cookware, cars, furniture, medical equipment, buildings, and roadways. Radioactive soils, concrete, asphalt, metal, piping, plastic, wood, tools, equipment and more from nuclear power reactors or weapons production could be ‘deregulated’ and sent to places never intended to receive them. Trash dumps or burners would bury or burn radioactive materials with household garbage like packaging and food scraps. Metal, plastic and other recyclers would (probably unknowingly) mix and melt radioactive materials with clean ones to be used to make new products. Contaminated concrete and asphalt could be crushed and used for roadbeds and building site preparation.

As nuclear power and weapons facilities across the country operate and close down, large amounts of long-lasting, dangerous nuclear waste is left. It needs to be isolated from the environment, but that can be expensive. So, those that make and those that regulate nuclear waste have come up with plans to sell some of that radioactive waste to scrap dealers and recyclers (diluting it in the marketplace) and to dump some of it at unregulated disposal facilities.

Weakening Radioactive Waste Requirements. Current regulations require most radioactive waste that is generated from the nuclear power and weapons fuel chain to be kept at facilities that are licensed or regulated for radioactive materials. Several federal agencies, such as Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), and Departments of Energy (DOE), Transportation (DOT) and Defense (DOD) want to *deregulate* nuclear waste; that is allow some of it to be *treated as if it is not radioactive*, to save money on “cleanups.”

Now EPA and NRC are in the process of setting *legal* contamination levels. They propose to deregulate nuclear waste allowing it to go to destinations neither designed nor licensed for radioactive materials. Under NRC’s proposed rule “Controlling Disposition of Solids” and under EPA’s advanced notice of proposed rule “... Management and Disposal of Low-Activity Radioactive Waste,” nuclear waste could end up in regular or hazardous leaking trash dumps and incinerators and at normal (not-nuclear) recycling facilities. From there it can get into zippers, playgrounds, tableware, you name it! EPA has a public comment period (early 2004) and NRC will have one later this year on their plans. (DOE will too.) Let them and your elected officials know what you think!

Transport rules that required “radioactive” signs and manifests on nuclear shipments have also just been weakened by the DOT and NRC. The new rules will enable dispersal into commerce and unregulated dumps without the recipients knowing that radioactive material is coming in. In addition, watching out for dirty bombs will be harder with more routine, legal contamination in unmarked shipments.

“Recycling” Radioactive Waste. While EPA and NRC want to open the floodgates to let out nuclear power waste, the trickle has already begun. Some nuclear wastes are getting out from nuclear power sites through provisions in their licenses and case-by-case approvals by the NRC. Some states such as Tennessee have licensed processors to ‘release’ radioactive materials, such as metals, asphalt, soil, concrete and lead into unrestricted commerce and to dump at solid waste sites in the state.

The Department of Energy (DOE) secretly adopted procedures in 1993 that began to allow some nuclear weapons waste to be deregulated and released to regular trash or commercial recycling. In 2000, DOE put a ban on sending radioactive metals into commercial recycling, but is now attempting to reverse that ban. In addition, DOE could be releasing non-metal wastes into commerce right now. If EPA, DOE and NRC get their way, undetermined amounts of nuclear waste will get out.

No Safe Level of Radiation. There is no safe level of exposure to radiation. Radiation is invisible, odorless, tasteless and tears at the very fabric of what makes us human—our genetic material. Children and the unborn are especially susceptible because of their rapid and abundant cell division during growth. In addition to cancer and birth defects, evidence exists that radiation is permanently mutating the gene pool and contributing to its gradual weakening, resulting in “developmental deficiencies in the fetus, hereditary disease, accelerated aging, and such non-specific effects as loss of immune competence.” [NS].

BE SAFE: Prevent “Recycled” Radioactive Materials From Invisibly Poisoning Consumers

BE SAFE's FOUR PRINCIPLES

1. HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

In the early 20th century when radiation was first 'discovered,' it was widely used in a variety of ways—shoe fitting, watches, and even in 'curatives.' This cavalier attitude caused needless exposures and many debilitating illnesses and excruciating deaths. Uranium miners and mining communities, largely indigenous people, suffer painful disease and early deaths from exposure to uranium. We now know radiation exposure causes almost every type of cancer including leukemia, lymphoma and lung cancer; tumors of various organs; birth defects such as Downs Syndrome, cleft palate and lip, congenital malformations and spinal defects; kidney and liver damage and more. [SMHS, BMJv, SRIC] Let's prevent unnecessary exposures to radiation by keeping the waste from nuclear power and weapons under lock and key.

2. PUT SAFETY FIRST

We must take preventative action to stop EPA and NRC from permitting radioactive materials from entering the marketplace and passing on a harmful legacy to future generations. We must do whatever we can to stop DOE from resuming recycling of radioactive metals and to stop letting other contaminated materials out into commerce. Radioactive materials, at any level, add unnecessarily to doses of radiation we already receive unavoidably from background radiation. The risks add up and are worsened by routine exposures to other carcinogens.

Government agencies, such as DOE and NRC, are already quietly releasing and recycling some radioactive materials into general commerce and regular garbage without public knowledge or meaningful record keeping. We must join forces to stop radioactive waste from entering the marketplace and environment where people would come into routine daily contact. We must put safety first and stop these misguided radiation "recycling" and deregulation proposals.

3. EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

Congress has control over the agencies promoting the deregulating and 'recycling' of nuclear waste. Let them know what you think about EPA, NRC, DOE, DOD and DOT working to legitimize and facilitate dispersing nuclear waste, rather than isolating it from people and the environment. Nuclear waste generators might save some money, but the public suffers. Safe levels of ionizing radiation simply do not exist. Make sure your elected officials at every level hear from you on this!

In 1992, in response to a national public outcry, Congress revoked similar policies that attempted to declare some nuclear waste "below regulatory concern (BRC)." Current government efforts are dressing up the rejected BRC proposal by applying the environmentally friendly term of "recycling." We don't buy it and our elected officials should not either. Government and industry must put public safety first by stopping the unnecessary production of radioactive wastes, and improving the methods of isolating waste that has already been created.

4. CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTIONS

More Information. Contact Nuclear Resource & Information Service at www.nirs.org or email dianed@nirs.org for more information. Visit www.citizen.org/cmep.

Join the Campaign to Stop Nuclear Waste Dispersal into the Marketplace and Unlicensed Dumps. Get petitions signed. Get commitments from manufacturers and recyclers not to take or use nuclear waste in their facilities. Email dianed@nirs.org.

Act Locally. Contact your local officials and ask them to pass Resolutions to oppose “recycling” nuclear waste into consumer products and dumping in landfills and incinerators.

Act Nationally. Your Letters Count: Write letters urging the federal government to halt any policy initiatives to “recycle” nuclear waste into consumer products.

- EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt;
leavitt.michael@epa.gov
(RE: Docket # OAR-2003-0095)
- NRC Chairman Nils J. Diaz, US NRC, Washington, DC 20555 or; chairman@nrc.gov
- DOE Secretary Spencer Abraham,
The.Secretary@hq.doe.gov
- DOT Secretary Norman Mineta,
Norman.Mineta@ost.dot.gov
- BE SURE to send copies to your elected officials—to whom these agencies are accountable!
- Senator ____ US Senate, Washington DC 20510.
- Representative ____ US House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515.

Your Vote Counts.

The next election will set the country’s course on nuclear waste recycling policies. For information on state and federal environmental voting records, contact www.sierraclub.org and www.lcv.org. To register to vote, contact www.earthday.net

BE SAFE.

Take precautionary action to protect our health from nuclear waste in consumer products. Sign on to the BE SAFE Platform on the next page. Be counted when we deliver this national Platform to the White House in 2005. Endorse the BE SAFE Platform today at www.besafenet.com.

Consumer Campaigns Halted Previous Radioactive “Recycling” Proposals

“There is no safe level of exposure and there is no dose of radiation so low that the risk of a malignancy is zero.”

Dr. Karl Morgan, the Founder of the Science of Health Physics

Consumers have successfully opposed past government proposals to deregulate radioactive waste and stopped widespread contamination in consumer goods in America and England.

- States have the right and responsibility to protect citizens’ health. In 1980, Congress gave states the responsibility for managing “low-level” radioactive waste. In response to past federal efforts to deregulate radioactive waste, over a dozen states and numerous local governments passed laws and regulations requiring the continued regulation of radioactive waste.
- In 1992, Congress revoked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s last effort to deregulate nuclear waste in response to a concerted national consumer campaign.
- In 2000, the Department of Energy (DOE) banned recycling of some potentially or known radioactive metals from radiological areas. These bans should be expanded to permanently cover all of DOE’s radioactive wastes.
- In England, opponents of nuclear waste “recycling” into commerce convinced their government to reject the European Commission’s Directive to deregulate radioactive materials.

References: The New Scientist, October, 1997 [NS]; Morris, M. Knorr, R. *The Southeastern Massachusetts Health Study 1978-1986*, Report of the Mass. Dept. of Public Health, Oct. 1990 [SMHS]; Gardner et al. “Results of Case-control Study of Leukemia and Lymphoma Among Young People Near Sellafield Nuclear Plant in West Cumbria,” *BMJv.* 300. Feb. 17, 1990 [BMJv]; Southwest Research and Information Center, “Uranium Legacy,” The Workbook, v. 8, no. 6, Albuquerque, NM 1983 (SRIC).

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BE SAFE Platform

In the 21st century, we envision a world in which our food, water and air are clean, and our children grow up healthy and thrive. Everyone needs a protected, safe community and workplace, and natural environment to enjoy. We can make this world vision a reality. The tools we bring to this work are prevention, safety, responsibility and democracy.

Our goal is to prevent pollution and environmental destruction before it happens. We support this precautionary approach because it is preventive medicine for our environment and health. It makes sense to:

- *Prevent pollution and make polluters, not taxpayers, pay and assume responsibility for the damage they cause;*
- *Protect our children from chemical and radioactive exposures to avoid illness and suffering;*
- *Promote use of safe, renewable, non-toxic technologies;*
- *Provide a natural environment we can all enjoy with clean air, swimmable, fishable water and stewardship for our national forests.*

*We choose a “better safe than sorry” approach motivated by caution and prevention.
We endorse the common-sense approach outlined in BE SAFE’s four principles listed below.*

Platform Principles

HEED EARLY WARNINGS

Government and industry have a duty to prevent harm, when there is credible evidence that harm is occurring or is likely to occur—even when the exact nature and full magnitude of harm is not yet proven.

PUT SAFETY FIRST

Industry and government have a responsibility to thoroughly study the potential for harm from a new chemical or technology before it is used—rather than assume it is harmless until proven otherwise. We need to ensure it is safe now, or we will be sorry later. Research on impacts to workers and the public needs to be confirmed by independent third parties.

EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

Precautionary decisions place the highest priority on protecting health and the environment, and help develop cleaner technologies and industries with effective safeguards and enforcement. Government and industry decisions should be based on meaningful citizen input and mutual respect (the golden rule), with the highest regard for those whose health may be affected and for our irreplaceable natural resources—not for those with financial interests. Uncompromised science should inform public policy.

CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTION

Decision-making by government, industry and individuals must include an evaluation of alternatives, and the choice of the safest, technically feasible solutions. We support innovation and promotion of technologies and solutions that create a healthy environment and economy, and protect our natural resources.

Take precautionary action to protect our health from nuclear waste recycling. Sign onto the BE SAFE Platform.

Be counted when we deliver this national platform to the White House in 2005. Endorse the platform today at www.besafenet.com

BE SAFE is coordinated by the Center for Health, Environment & Justice. To sign the platform or for more information, contact us at CHEJ, P.O. Box 6806, Falls Church, VA 22040, 703-237-2249, or 518-732-4538, or visit www.besafenet.com

