

# REVISITING AMERICA'S NUCLEAR WASTE POLICY

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for 21st Century Energy Releases a Policy Paper On Near- and Long-Term Options to Manage the Nation's Nuclear Waste

*"Yucca Mountain has been demonstrated to be the best solution under current law, but is by no means the only solution for managing America's nuclear waste. If the Obama administration and Congress plan to change course after 30 years of independent scientific review and billions in investment, they have a legal responsibility to the American people and utilities that have paid more than \$28 billion in fees and interest to immediately craft a workable long-term solution."*

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Nuclear energy currently powers 20 percent of U.S. electricity needs. To continue to provide reliable and affordable electricity and do so from an emissions-free energy source, which is a key focus of the Obama Administration, nuclear power will play an increasingly prominent role. This is demonstrated by the 20 companies which have submitted applications to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to build 26 new nuclear reactors in the next decade.

The nation's current fleet of 104 nuclear reactors operating today generate approximately 2,000 metric tons of used fuel annually – enough to fit into a large dumpster. With the needed expansion of nuclear power, the amount of used fuel produced will also increase. The time is ripe for a permanent solution.

The U.S. Chamber's Institute for 21st Century Energy today unveils a report calling on the Obama administration to commit to a workable plan for the long-term management of the nation's used nuclear fuel and nuclear waste. To aid a Blue Ribbon Panel that Secretary Chu announced he is forming in March 2009 to review the current policy, the Institute makes the following recommendations on the nation's used nuclear fuel and nuclear waste:

- Consider restructuring the federal government's management structure for implementing the country's nuclear waste policy, including moving management from the Department of Energy to an outside entity—such as a government corporation—with access to the Nuclear Waste Fund and free of annual appropriations roadblocks.
- Begin a program to site, license, and operate interim storage facilities on DOE sites or other sites that have expressed interest in temporarily storing the used fuel and begin retrieving used nuclear fuel stored temporarily across the country.
- Establish a clear path for constructing a permanent nuclear waste repository and fully fund the Yucca Mountain license application process underway at the NRC to gain knowledge and insight. If the recommendation is to site the repository anywhere other than at Yucca Mountain, the panel must justify deviating from U.S. law and recommend mechanisms that can be employed to encourage states and communities to volunteer as the host.
- Assess the retrievability requirement in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act for waste disposed in a permanent repository and consider other mediums and locations with fewer political, regulatory, scientific, or economic obstacles.
- Consider whether to close the nuclear fuel cycle to harness the energy in used fuel, lessen the volume of waste, and reduce security risks and determine what technologies and timelines should be employed.
- Evaluate whether utilities should continue paying a nuclear waste fee and consider depositing the fees in a private escrow account.