



[HOME](#) » [POLITICS](#) » [GOVERNMENT](#)

[Energy Conservation Ideas](#)

Let Liberty Utilities West Show You Some Great Energy Saving



[Obama creates new position,...](#)

['Favoritism' in SLS...](#)

Posted March 24, 2015 - 1:17pm | **Updated** March 24, 2015 - 5:18pm

OBAMA SHIFTS GEARS ON NUCLEAR WASTE; YUCCA IMPACT UNCERTAIN

By STEVE TETREAULT
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama shifted gears Tuesday on nuclear waste in a move that could put even more distance between his administration and the Yucca Mountain site in Nevada.

Obama signed a memorandum that puts the Department of Energy on a path to develop separate repositories for waste produced at nuclear power plants and for radioactive material generated by the government's Cold War pursuit of atomic weapons.

The “de-commingling” of civilian and defense nuclear waste reverses a policy set in 1985 by President Ronald Reagan, and that guided blueprints for the once-favored but

now mothballed Yucca site, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

With government efforts stalled to dispose of the deadly material, Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said in a speech it could be easier and quicker now to locate a site and get a repository licensed and built for the defense-generated waste, which makes up only about 15 percent of the nuclear waste inventory and generally is not as “hot” or as challenging to handle as commercial waste.

Along those lines, Moniz said studies also are underway to determine if some of the nuclear material formed into cylinders or in granular form could be dropped into boreholes drilled 3 miles deep into the earth.

Moniz said setting a separate path for defense waste grew from the report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on America’s Nuclear Future that studied U.S. radioactive waste management for two years and issued its findings in 2012.

Noting that waste technologies have advanced since the mid-1980s, Moniz declared, “It’s time to update our nuclear waste policies.”

Most of the defense waste is stored in various forms at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state, at the Idaho National Laboratory and at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina

Not coincidentally, leaders from those states have been the most vocal in pressuring the government to come up with a nuclear waste solution that had been Yucca Mountain until Obama terminated the program in 2010 at the urging of Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev.

The Obama memorandum authorized the Department of Energy to move forward on planning a defense-only repository. Moniz outlined the new strategy in a speech at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington think tank.

Nevada officials said implications of the Obama strategy shift were not immediately clear for the still-dormant Yucca site, which was envisioned as an “all-purpose” nuclear waste repository, and which still enjoys pockets of support in Congress.

New attention was focused on Yucca over the weekend when Rep. Crescent Hardy, R-Nev., suggested in a newspaper column that Nevada should commence talks with the

Department of Energy over potential state benefits if the program were revived.

But while the state might roil in internal debate over Yucca Mountain, the Moniz announcement appears to be a sign the Obama administration is continuing to put distance between itself and the Nevada site it disavowed five years ago. Administration officials have declared the Yucca site “unworkable” in large part because Nevada hasn’t wanted it.

Supporters of the Yucca project said spinning off defense waste signals a likely death knell for a project already hanging on a thread.

“I have real concerns with pursuing a secondary site for military waste,” said Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. “Doing so is likely to cast aside the Yucca site with years of work and billions of dollars spent.”

Lake Barrett, a former director of the Yucca program, characterized the strategy shift as a work-around made necessary by Obama’s agreement with Reid to halt the Nevada program.

“What they propose is just continuing the political obstruction of the current law with an illusion of progress,” Barrett said.

Moniz said plans for defense nuclear waste does not minimize the need for a temporary storage and ultimately a repository for commercial nuclear waste.

The energy secretary said his department will step up efforts this year to recruit willing hosts for both a pilot and a full-scale site where nuclear waste could be consolidated from a dozen or so locations for starters and kept safely in dry casks while work continues to woo potential hosts for a permanent repository.

“What we really want to do now is move this process forward for this consent-based interaction with communities and states to get our storage program going,” he said.

The Moniz announcement comes on the same day that four senators renewed a campaign to reorganize the government’s nuclear waste management through legislation revived from last year.

The bill by Sens. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., Maria

Cantwell, D-Wash., and Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., would create an independent agency to handle nuclear waste, taking the job from the Department of Energy. It also would create a new fund to finance nuclear waste projects, and would authorize the construction of a defense-only repository.

It would also write into law that waste repositories must be developed through a cooperative “consent-based” approach with states, Indian tribes and local governments — a marked difference from how Nevada officials say that the Yucca Mountain program was forced on the Silver State.

Contact Las Vegas Review-Journal Washington Bureau Chief Steve Tetreault at stetreault@reviewjournal.com or 202-783-1760. Find him on Twitter: @[STetreaultDC](https://twitter.com/STetreaultDC).

RELATED

[Yucca Mountain tour set for April](#)

[DOE on agency’s Yucca visit: Nothing to see here](#)

[Obama creates new position,...](#)

[‘Favoritism’ in SLS...](#)

How to Remove Dark Spots



Watch Shocking Presentation

From the Web

Sponsored Links by Taboola

**3 Companies Poised to Explode
When Cable Dies**

The Motley Fool

**10 Pics of Jennifer Lawrence Before
She Was Famous!**

Trending.Report

**Do You Know The Signs Of
Rheumatoid Arthritis?**

WebMD

**2015 Surprises Drivers With a New
Rule**

Improve Insurance Quotes

**Most Outrageous Gowns at the Met
Gala**

The Cut

**How this Razor is Changing the
Shaving Industry**

Harry's