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U.S. to Owe Billions for Delays in Nuclear Dump, Official Says

By [MATTHEW L. WALD](#)

WASHINGTON, March 6 — The federal government will owe \$7 billion in damages for delays in opening a nuclear waste dump if the repository opens in 2017 — the earliest date now possible — and any further delay will raise the price half a billion dollars a year, the head of the radioactive waste program said Tuesday.

The money would reimburse current and former nuclear plant operators who signed contracts under which the federal government agreed to begin accepting their wastes in 1998.

The official, Edward F. Sproat III, director of the Office of Civilian Radioactive [Waste Management](#), said progress toward opening a waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nev., near Las Vegas, had been slowed by lack of money, despite a \$19.5 billion fund financed by a fee on each kilowatt-hour of electricity generated by reactors.

He said the administration would ask Congress on Wednesday for easier access to the money. But he also acknowledged that the schedule had been hurt by problems in his office and with its contractors; 60 percent of the work his office is doing this year involves reanalyzing data that was rejected earlier because of signs of fraud.

The administration will also request that the site be permitted to store more than the 70,000 metric tons originally set by Congress. That limit was set with the idea that the Energy Department would look for a second site, but it has made small progress toward opening the first one.

Mr. Sproat spoke at a breakfast sponsored by The Energy Daily, a trade publication, and [Areva](#), a reactor vendor.

The nuclear waste issue has become more acute because for the first time since the 1970s, companies want to build new reactors, according to Mr. Sproat and others. But Mr. Sproat said investors would not lend money for construction unless the Energy Department resumed offering contracts to the utilities for waste disposal.