

**TESTIMONY OF ROSS ANDERSON
MAYOR, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. SENATE**

MAY 22, 2002

Members of the Committee:

I am Ross Anderson, Mayor of Salt Lake City, Utah. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the wholly inadequate proposal to transport deadly nuclear waste across country for storage at Yucca Mountain and the shortsighted national nuclear policy that has led to that proposal.

The people of Salt Lake City are intimately familiar with the tragic politics of nuclear exploitation. Thousands of Utah downwinders have suffered and died – and more continue to suffer and die – as the result of nuclear weapons testing in Nevada during the Cold War. Private companies target Utah as a prime dumping ground for so-called “low-level” radioactive wastes. Further, a coalition of electric utilities is seeking to exploit the impoverished Goshute Indian tribe to create a purported “temporary” storage site for spent nuclear fuel rods just 70 miles from Salt Lake City.

From experience, we know that the Yucca Mountain proposal would put most Americans, including all the citizens of Salt Lake City, at tremendous risk, by creating tens of thousands of highly lethal “dirty bombs” and shipping them through large metropolitan areas on a daily basis. To make matters worse, even if there were no serious risks from the transportation of this high-level nuclear waste, the Yucca Mountain project would not be a long-term solution to the problem of nuclear waste. The project only further accommodates the irresponsible actions of our nation’s nuclear industry – facilitating the production of even more nuclear waste and worsening our federal government’s addiction to nuclear power, without addressing the fundamental issue of how to deal with the ever-increasing amounts of these deadly substances.

Transportation Risks.

A detailed transportation plan for shipping nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain has not yet been developed, and not one transportation cask in use has been physically tested to withstand plausible accident or terrorism scenarios. These facts illustrate the irresponsible and undemocratic manner in which this project is being developed. Without adequate research as to the safety of transporting this waste, without details of where and how it will travel, the American public, our representatives in Congress, and our federal regulatory agencies are being asked to sign off on one of the most expensive projects – and perhaps the most dangerous project – in the history of the United States.

If the Yucca Mountain proposal were approved, huge amounts of nuclear waste would be transported through Salt Lake City every day for many years. Virtually all of the major shipping routes to Yucca Mountain from the eastern US, both rail and highway, traverse Utah. Salt Lake City will, by all estimations, see more traffic of nuclear waste than any other US city except Las Vegas. Utah will be second only to Nevada in the number of high-level waste and spent nuclear fuel shipments routed through the state.

Rail lines that may be used to transport spent fuel rods through Salt Lake City to Yucca Mountain lie 25 feet from residents' backyards. The trains travel within 100 feet of playgrounds. Six schools are within half a mile of transportation routes, well in range to receive measurable daily doses of radiation from incident-free transportation. Two interstate highways, the major arterials for truck transport from the east coast, run right through the heart of our city. Trains stopped at crossings and trucks stopped in traffic will sit only a few feet away from our citizens on a daily basis.

Scientists estimate that incident-free transportation, mostly by truck, will cause as many as 31 cancer fatalities nationwide.³ This incident-free scenario assumes transportation utopia and does not take into account the Department of Energy estimates for transportation incidents and accidents.

Catastrophic loss of life could accompany a single major accident in a metropolitan area or in a major watershed area like Salt Lake City's. Such a scenario is almost a certainty. Human error is inevitable. Scientists predict as many as 340 transportation accidents and 2,395 incidents involving the waste during the transport period. These numbers do not include the risks of terrorism – a very real possibility even before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. A single terrorist attack, which could be carried out with far less planning and resources than the September 11th attacks, could result in thousands of cancer fatalities and cost up to \$17 billion in adverse economic impacts.

Protecting the Salt Lake 2002 Winter Olympic Games for less than two weeks, in a relatively constrained geographical area, was a monumental task, requiring over 15,000 law enforcement officers and costing over \$310 million. Adequately protecting tens of thousands of highly lethal shipments of nuclear waste as they travel thousands of miles through dozens of major cities over a period of 38 years will be impossible.

With tragic ramifications, our federal government has failed in the past to responsibly deal with major terrorism-related security concerns. We implore you to acknowledge the horrendous terrorism-related security risks entailed in transporting, by rail and truck, highly lethal spent nuclear fuel and to assume the responsibility that is yours to protect the people of this country, including later generations – and to protect our economy – from those risks.

The Yucca Mountain Proposal is Not a Solution to Our Long-Term Nuclear Fuel Storage Problems.

The most astounding fact about all the transportation risks inherent in the Yucca Mountain proposal is that they serve no fundamental long-term purpose. The safety of communities where nuclear waste is generated will not be significantly increased. Plants will still produce waste on site and will still be just as likely to fail in generation and storage operations. They will also remain just as likely targets of terrorist attack as they are today.

There are no plans for the storage of waste after 2036, when Yucca Mountain will be at capacity. Therefore, after creating all of the significant risks to millions of Americans resulting from the Yucca Mountain project, we will not be able to say we have solved the long-term problem of nuclear waste storage. We will only have facilitated the continuation – and exacerbation – of a dangerous situation that has no foreseeable solution short of vastly reducing or eliminating the production of nuclear waste.

Congress has created a process with a foregone conclusion. It has made promises to the nuclear utilities that it cannot keep and continues to appease the utilities that have profited while creating this enormous, dangerous dilemma for our nation. It is guaranteeing that an ever-growing amount of nuclear waste will be strewn across the United States, putting many generations of Americans at serious risk.

A Better, Long-Term Approach

There is a better approach. Instead of pursuing half-measures that put millions of Americans at risk, we can take effective steps now to accomplish permanent solutions, including the reduction of threats posed by the disposal of existing spent nuclear fuel and vastly curtailing the production of nuclear waste in the future.

First, nuclear fuel should be stored where it is produced until a comprehensive, safe, and permanent solution to the entire storage problem is found. While nuclear power advocates dismiss this plea of Nevadans and Utahns as a “Not-In-My-Backyard” argument, they epitomize the crass hypocrisy of the industries and communities that welcomed inexpensive nuclear power at their doorsteps but now refuse to take responsibility for it in their backyards. The utilities proposing “temporary” storage of nuclear fuel at the Goshute Reservation near Salt Lake City have represented that these lethal materials can be safely stored in aboveground casks. If that is true, the materials can be stored in those casks where the materials are produced while Congress plans for an effective, long-term solution to nuclear waste in America.

Second, we must decommission nuclear power plants, at least until reprocessing or some other technology eliminates the problems of nuclear waste. Only 20% of electricity generated in the US comes from nuclear power. We can and should make investments in conservation and alternative generation technologies that will make up for the energy generated by nuclear power plants. In the same way we led the atomic age, the United

States has the opportunity to be a leader in conservation and alternative production technologies.

Conclusion

The people of Utah were lied to repeatedly when told that government plans were safe. We will not be lied to again. We will not allow Congress and the Department of Energy to treat Utah and Nevada as remote, disposable places, where the self-inflicted problems of the reckless nuclear power industry – and of a federal government that has been astoundingly irresponsible in its nuclear policy – can be conveniently dumped.

Reversing the momentum behind the Yucca Mountain proposal will not be easy. It will take political courage. It will take an honest admission of failure. It will take a return to integrity. But it is the only way to take real steps toward reaching a permanent solution to the long-term problems of nuclear waste in America. Together, we can make the hard decisions and take a leadership role in global environmental responsibility. While seeking to make good on broken promises of the past regarding the safe, permanent storage of nuclear waste, Congress can finally set right our nation's nuclear policy – for the long-term benefit of our country's public health, safety and security.