

nuclear waste



One of the inescapable problems associated with the nuclear industry is the waste created.

Radioactive waste is produced at every stage of the nuclear cycle, from the mining of uranium to the production of nuclear energy, nuclear medicine or nuclear weapons.

The waste can be radioactive for periods of up to hundreds of thousands of years, threatening our environment and health.

In the United States alone, around 6 metric tons of nuclear waste is created every day.

And despite the millions of dollars that have gone into creating the nuclear industry, a coherent and proven solution to the problem of nuclear waste has still not been developed and perhaps never will be.

The inevitable consequence of anything produced by the nuclear industry is long lived radioactive waste, and this fact can not be separated out from discussions about nuclear weapons disarmament or any other nuclear activity.

The movement of waste is simply transferring a problem from one place to another, it will not go away. The targeting of less powerful peoples and nations to become dump sites for the world's nuclear waste in the name of economic development is simply environmental racism, and should not be tolerated. No sovereign nation on earth should be made to bear the brunt of the toxicity of the nuclear age.

Any claim of a successful solution for the permanent disposal of this material is premature, and is simply the claim of an industry intent on generating this waste as a by-product of its activity.

Any long-term plan for the storage of nuclear materials from reactors and from dismantled weapons should not centralize waste, and should not transport waste - the dangers of both are too high. Nuclear waste should be internationally negotiated and verifiable, and its management should begin with the only solution to stopping the creation of more waste - closing down the industry as a bad mistake.

The shocking and inescapable truth is that when the last nuclear weapon is disarmed and the nuclear power stations stand quiet and obsolete, there will still be a legacy of radioactive waste to pass on from our generation to all those after us.

Out of site...out of mind... an **Australian** story

In 2000, the Australian Federal Government proposed a national radioactive waste dump in the central desert homelands of South Australia. This dump was proposed to address the problem of nuclear waste generated by the Lucas Height reactor, a small research reactor located in the city of Sydney. The research reactor was fast becoming obsolete and the government wanted to update the technology and expand the reactor facilities. Due to strong community opposition, they were not permitted to do this unless they found a solution to the problem of nuclear waste generated by the reactor.

Previously most waste from Lucas Heights was stored at the reactor facility itself and periodically transported to France's Cogema facilities for reprocessing, leaving open the dangerous possibility of radioactive leaks at the site or during transportation across the Pacific. The Australian Government sought to establish a low level nuclear waste dump far from residential areas and therefore in the Australian desert. However the area they have chosen is traditional lands of the local indigenous people, and there is strong opposition from these indigenous traditional owners and the broader Australian community to the nuclear dump.

The great fear about the establishment of a small national radioactive waste dump within Australia is that this will open the door to high level international nuclear waste. There have already been proposals put to the Australian government for a high level nuclear waste dump and although there have been strong statements of opposition to such proposals, the people of Australia are rightfully concerned that the nuclear industry will continue to push for this plan. The problem of waste storage or disposal will not go away and because the waste is long lived, the industry will necessarily continue to push for high level dumps in politically and geographically stable countries such as Australia.

The proposed national nuclear waste dump in Australia will only have an 'institutional control period' of 100 years. This means the dumps operator is only responsible under law for 100 years. It is also claimed that the dump will only have an 'engineering integrity' of 300 years. However, some of the waste they intend to dump have half lives extending far beyond these minimal amounts of time.

At both ends of the nuclear cycle, from where the uranium is dug up to where the waste is dumped, it is indigenous people who bear the brunt of this dirty industry.

For more information please see the Iratiwanti website of the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta women fighting against the proposed nuclear waste dump in Australia: www.iratiwanti.org