

Regulators Close to OK on Blended Nuke Waste

JOSH LOFTIN, Associated Press



SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah

regulators expect to have a decision within a month on whether to allow the storage of a mix of high- and low-level nuclear waste at a disposal site 30 miles west of Salt Lake City.

Although studies have not been completed, Division of Radiation Control director Rusty Lundberg said it appears likely the blended waste will not exceed permitted levels of radioactivity. But the waste would have higher levels than what is currently stored at the EnergySolutions facility in Clive, Utah.

The application for the waste was discussed during a sometimes heated public meeting hosted by the division Tuesday, but no decisions were made.

The division has been studying the company's proposal to bring the blended waste from Tennessee after the two levels have been mixed in a way that "completely changes its physical and chemical properties," Lundberg said. It is not simply high-level waste diluted until it meets permitted levels.

One of the division's lingering concerns is whether the blending is being done to skirt a state law that prohibits the more radioactive class B and C nuclear waste, Lundberg said. EnergySolutions provided some information last week to ease those concerns.

While regulators seemed poised to approve the waste, opponents warned that —

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based on industry studies — the blended product is up to 800 percent more radioactive than the permitted class A waste.

"This would mean a dramatic increase in the radioactivity of materials being brought into the state for disposal," said Matt Pacenza, spokesman for the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah.

Tom Magette, a senior vice president for EnergySolutions, disputed the dramatic increase cited by opponents. But even if they were accurate, he said the waste would still be 25 percent lower than the permitted maximum.

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