



Nuke cleanup board wants more info on out-of-state waste

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The Idaho Cleanup Project Citizens Advisory Board plans to ask the Department of Energy for more information before making any recommendations about the future of the Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Project.

After about an hour of debate on a conference call Wednesday, the board voted 5-3 to [send a letter that asks the DOE](#) to share with the board the results of a study it is doing on the benefits and effects of using the eastern Idaho plant to process transuranic waste from other sites.

The letter asks DOE questions about how it would address concerns about the effect on Idaho's cleanup budget and about waste transportation and storage and how affected parties such as state agencies and environmental and economic development groups would be involved in the decision-making process. And, it asks how AMWTP could continue to process waste there while complying with the terms of the 1995 Settlement Agreement.

“Considering the imminent completion of AMWTP’s current mission, we stress that time is of the essence,” the letter says. “The ICP CAB recommends DOE commit the resources necessary for a vigorous fact-based and open consideration of the ongoing use of this unique and valuable asset. We recognize that inaction is, by default, likely a decision to close AMWTP.”

The board decided to send this letter instead of another one that [would have acknowledged some of the same issues but also explicitly asked the DOE](#) to continue to use the plant to treat transuranic waste that is stored out of state now.

The AMWTP is compacting barrels of decades-old transuranic waste stored here before they are shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico for permanent storage. The facility, which is located in the desert west of Idaho Falls, is expected to finish processing this waste sometime next year, leading to questions of what it would be used for after that and what will happen to its roughly 700 jobs.

DOE [officials are evaluating whether to keep it open](#) to treat more nuclear waste that is currently stored out of state, particularly from the Hanford Site in Washington state. Arguments in favor of keeping AMWTP open include preserving potentially hundreds of jobs, helping with the goal of cleaning up the decades-old waste located at sites throughout the country as a result of Cold War research and weapons development, and saving taxpayer money by keeping the DOE’s only “supercompactor” in operation.

“Your (the CAB board’s) recommendation really is the first step to some kind of closure,” Dana Kirkham, who is the science, technology and research director for Regional Economic Development for Eastern Idaho, said during the public comment period.

Concerns include whether keeping the facility open could be done without violating the 1995 agreement, which says any new waste brought into the state must be treated within six months and shipped out of state within another six months, and whether problems at WIPP would result in waste piling up in the state.

“We really have to consider that the infrastructure at WIPP is aging and, in that situation, accidents and problems are not going to be more rare, they’re going to be more common,” said Beatrice Brailsford, nuclear program director with the watchdog group the Snake River Alliance. “If we bring waste in, it will be stranded in Idaho.”

Marc Johnson, chief of staff for former Gov. Cecil Andrus, said keeping the leverage provided by the settlement agreement is needed to compel the Department of Energy to keep its word. When Andrus was in office he fought to keep nuclear waste out of the state.

“Idaho needs to focus on finishing, in an appropriate manner, the cleanup in Idaho,” Johnson said.

Citizens Advisory Board member Brad Christensen was among those who argued in favor of sending DOE a letter backing continuing to process waste at the plant. The DOE is gathering facts and considering what to do anyway, he said.

“That’s a recommendation for a study,” he said of the letter the board ended up approving. “That’s the epitome of bureaucracy.”

A majority of board members, however, seemed to feel they needed more information before they could go on record supporting keeping the AMWTP running to process out-of-state waste.

“I think there are a lot of issues that do need to be looked at ... before we can give a recommendation,” said board member Josh Bartlome.

[Icpcab Draft Rec 152 2](#) by [Jeff Robinson](#) on Scribd