

## US nuclear industry wants no Yucca waste dump limit

*It would certainly save the problem of adding a further nuclear disposal site somewhere but it would still be better to recycle the partially used fuel.*

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The Bush administration should remove federal limits on the amount of nuclear waste that could be stored at a proposed waste dump in the Nevada desert, U.S. nuclear industry lobbyists said on Thursday.

The government's plan to build an underground waste dump in the Nevada desert about 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas is more than 10 years behind schedule and continues to be plagued by scientific foul-ups and political stonewalling.

In coming weeks, the Bush administration is expected to send its latest legislative proposal to Congress, with the aim of moving the stalled plan forward. Republican Pete Domenici, chairman of the Senate Energy Committee and a nuclear industry proponent, will lead that effort in Congress.

Officials at the Nuclear Energy Institute, which lobbies for the utility owners of the 103 U.S. nuclear power plants, say the administration should remove the 77,000-ton limit (70,000 metric tons) on waste allowed at the site.

"This capacity limit is something that needs to be dealt with," Steve Kraft, the group's senior director of used fuel management, told reporters, calling the current number an "artificial limit" that was driven by politics, not science.

Kraft declined to say what the new limit should be, but pointed to Energy Department studies that show that Yucca Mountain could hold up to 115.5 tons (105 metric tons).

At the rate that waste is stacking up at U.S. nuclear plants, Yucca Mountain could be fully subscribed when it opens, Kraft said.

Spent fuel from the nation's nuclear plants -- which supply about 20 percent of U.S. electricity -- is piling up, with over 50,000 tons (45,500 metric tons) of it stored at over 100 temporary locations in 39 states.

The administration should also freeze a per-kilowatt fee that nuclear operators pay into a federal fund, and waive rules that require the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to certify that nuclear waste can be moved to a federal storage site like Yucca Mountain by a certain date, Kraft said.

Such rule changes will clear the way for the nine to 12 new nuclear plants that the Nuclear Energy Institute expects to be built in the United States over the next 20 years, Kraft said.

Despite delays, the Yucca dump should open by 2025, Kraft said. "The scientific basis hasn't changed," he said. "The (Energy Department) has run into a series of bumps in the road that they need to straighten out."

According to Energy Department officials, the administration's proposal would ensure that funds Congress set aside to build Yucca Mountain are secure. Opponents of the

plan -- including Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid -- have attempted to strangle the project by cutting off funds.

The administration proposal would also reserve about 147,000 acres of federally owned land to build a railway corridor to transport spent fuel to the Yucca Mountain site.

"The draft legislation is still being tweaked," an Energy Department spokesman said. "When appropriate, (we) will submit it for congressional consideration."

Meanwhile, the Nuclear Energy Institute has hired Alex Flint, the Senate energy panel's staff director, who will become a senior vice president for governmental affairs later this year.