

Rachel's Environment & Health News

#19 - Radioactive Waste Sites Sought In Eastern States Once Again; Grassroots Opposition Building April 05, 1987

The federal government has flip-flopped again and will soon be looking for places to begin drilling in eastern states, looking for a permanent home for the nation's enormous backlog of high-level radioactive wastes. The wastes are temporarily stored in pools of water at operating nuclear power plants, but the pools are filling up. The search for deep-earth repositories in eastern states had been announced several years ago but was canceled for what seemed to be political reasons. Now the east will once again be examined for a possible "second repository;" the "first repository" will still be built in Nevada or Washington state or Texas, if federal officials have their way.

However, federal radioactive waste disposal programs are "on the verge of technical, legal, and political collapse," according to a coalition of grass roots citizen groups who have been monitoring federal programs carefully. Called the National Nuclear Waste Task Force, the coalition has active citizen groups in Nevada, Washington state, Texas, Mississippi, Utah, Oregon, Tennessee, Georgia, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Their immediate goal is to alert Congress to the failure of nuclear waste programs that the federal Department of Energy (DOE) manages under authority of the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act. They want federal funding cut and DOE's present programs halted.

The Task Force says DOE has mismanaged the program, has allowed political considerations to cloud its science, has selected both first and second repository candidate sites that appear to be technically unsuitable, and has proposed an expensive, unnecessary, and dangerous "Monitored Retrievable Storage (MRS)" facility to be built in Tennessee to make up for the program's other failures.

The Task Force is calling for establishment of an independent commission to review DOE's repository and MRS programs. To get involved in the Task Force's efforts, contact Caroline Petti, 2001 O Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036; phone (202) 457-0545.

--Peter Montague

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GET YOUR DRINKING WATER TESTED TO SEE IF IT IS CLEAN AND SAFE

Is your drinking water safe? The only way to find out is to test it periodically--once a year or more often. Who can do the tests?

One possibility is a mail-order water testing firm that delivers high quality results at reasonable prices, such as the WaterTest Corporation of Manchester, NH. The cost of their service includes the cost of door-to-door overnight sample pickup, sampling bottles, instructions for taking the samples, and a chemical pack that freezes samples so they arrive at the New Hampshire laboratory fresh. You receive written results in 6 to 10 days, a booklet that helps you interpret the results, plus access to WaterTest's technical staff on an 800 hotline phone.

WaterTest has three basic groups of tests they perform; the simplest, called the Basic Test, costs \$54.95 and is recommended if you drink from a well, if you purchase water from a public supply that's drawn from a well, or if there have been reports of bacterial problems in your water supply. The Basic Test covers 10 common measures of water quality: fluoride, chloride, pH, hardness, copper, iron, manganese, sodium, nitrates, and bacteria.

The Standard Test covers everything in the Basic Test plus lead, mercury, arsenic, chromium, silver, selenium, barium, cadmium, zinc, nickel, calcium, sulfate, potassium, magnesium, total dissolved solids, and alkalinity. The federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requires this test once each year for all public water supplies. (Twenty percent of all public systems fail this test, and the public is almost never told.) The federal law does not cover private

wells, so if you drink from a well, you're on your own.

If you suspect the presence of hazardous organic chemicals, you should consider WaterTest's SuperTest; it's \$174.95 and it covers everything in the Standard Test, plus 33 organic chemicals: carbon tetrachloride, 1,2-dichloroethane, 1,1-dichloroethane, 1,1,2,2-tetrachloroethane, 2-chlorovinyl ether, 1,1-dichloroethylene, 1,2-dichloropropane, methylene chloride, methyl bromide, tetrachloroethylene (PCE), dichlorodifluoromethane, dichlorobromomethane, chlorodibromomethane, chloroform, bromoform, benzene, ethylbenzene, 1,4-dichlorobenzene, 1,2-dichlorobenzene, chlorobenzene, 1,1,1-trichloroethane, 1,1,2-trichloroethane, chloroethane, trichlorofluoromethane, 1,2-trans-dichloroethylene, 1,3-dichloropropylene, chloromethane, trichloroethylene (TCE), ethylene dibromide (EDB), vinyl chloride, toluene, chlorobenzene, and 1,3-dichlorobenzene.

These 33 organic compounds represent typical chemicals found in dry cleaning, gasoline stations, manufacturing, toxic dumps, and household garbage. WaterTest will test for the 33 organics alone for \$104.95.

A test for bacteria alone in your water supply costs \$29.95, and a test for lead alone costs \$31.95. A test (called GC-608) for 20 pesticides costs \$400. WaterTest will also do special tests (for example, PCBs) on request.

If you check prices locally from certified laboratories, you will see that WaterTest is competitive; the quality of their service is widely respected.

For more information, contact Kent Threlfall at WaterTest, 33 S. Commercial St., Manchester, NH 03101-2610; phone 800-426-8378.

--Peter Montague

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