



[<< Back to E&E Publishing index page.](#)

## NUCLEAR WASTE: DOE takes first steps toward a post-Yucca future

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A Department of Energy team has begun crafting strategies for reaching out to communities that might accept and store nuclear waste.

"The team is actively developing plans and performing technical analysis of various components of an integrated waste management system, as well as evaluating the Department's next steps in the consent-based siting process," a DOE spokesman confirmed in an email.

The team was created as part of a [plan](#) outlined by the Obama administration two years ago that calls for creating a permanent geologic wastes repository by 2048. The plan's mum on the fate of the Yucca Mountain, Nev., nuclear waste repository.

The plan springs from recommendations released by President Obama's Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future in 2012. The 15-member panel -- which included then-MIT professor and now-DOE chief Ernest Moniz -- was asked to find alternatives for storing more than 65,000 metric tons of nuclear waste after the administration declared Yucca Mountain unworkable.

The commission's report says U.S. waste policy needs to be revamped, regardless of Yucca, and called on the administration and Congress to quickly develop storage sites and dumps. It calls for a consent-based process for siting one or more temporary storage sites and geologic repositories ([E&ENews PM](#), Jan. 11, 2013).

So far, communities in Texas and New Mexico have offered to host temporary storage sites ([E&E Daily](#), June 19).

Moniz said earlier this year that DOE would soon begin identifying and vetting a defense-waste repository and separate sites for one or more interim facilities for old fuel from shuttered reactors, but he also made clear DOE would need congressional approval -- and more authority -- to build the facilities ([E&ENews PM](#), March 24).

Sources say the new DOE team is part of larger changes afoot at the department. DOE, they say, is also tasking other staffers to take closer look at managing used reactor fuel.

Andrew Griffith, a former Navy officer who is currently DOE's associate deputy assistant secretary for fuel cycle technologies in the Office of Nuclear Energy, will lead a new effort focusing on storage of reactor waste, sources said. He will report to John Kotek, the office's acting assistant secretary, who staffed the Blue Ribbon Commission.

In recent months, the White House has taken other steps to tackle defense and commercial waste and begin exploring the possibility of burying radioactive nuclear waste far below the Earth's surface in deep, geologic bore holes.

But Yucca backers question just how meaningful this latest step will be -- and what it means for the Nevada repository.

Lake Barrett, a former DOE official turned consultant, said he appreciates DOE's decision to assemble a team to find a path forward for consent-based siting rather than simply blocking Yucca for political reasons.

"For nearly six years, DOE has done virtually nothing, except destroy the Yucca Mountain program for Sen. Reid's 2010 election campaign," he said, referencing avowed Yucca foe, Nevada Democrat Harry Reid. "Hopefully this is something meaningful and not another red herring distraction attempting to portray some phony progress."

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