

Economist contests nuclear waste site

Volume of waste declining, he says

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A planned nuclear dump in the California desert and others proposed around the nation would be costly, unnecessary and could sink the industry, an economist said Wednesday.

The nation's three current dumps for low-level radioactive waste have excess capacity well into the next century because the volume of waste is sharply down due to recycling and new compaction technologies, said F. Gregory Hayden, a University of Nebraska professor.

A new dump such as Ward Valley project in southeastern California would be the final straw for struggling disposal sites, Hayden said.

"If it's opened, it will break the system that the rest of the nation depends on," Hayden said. "They're already in trouble because of the trickle of waste."

Opponents in the 17-year-old battle over a California dump brought Hayden to City Hall for a news conference. Hayden has opposed a Nebraska site in his role as state representative on one of the interstate compacts established to build new dumps.

Up to now, environmentalists, politicians and Indian tribe members who live close to the proposed 1,000-acre Ward Valley site near Needles have based their opposition on fears that the plan to bury radioactive waste in trenches at the dump would poison the water table, imperil wildlife and possibly pollute the nearby Colorado River.

But the capacity argument is conclusive, argued Daniel Hirsch, president of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, an environmental group that has fought the dump.

"The very reason for this whole fight has disappeared," Hirsch said. "I feel that ... the war is over."

However, Gov. Pete Wilson intends to continue pressing for the federal government to cede land for the dump site, a spokeswoman said.

"This study changes nothing," Lisa Kalustian said. "The other sites that are named are unreliable, we don't have guaranteed access to them. The low-level radioactive waste is still being produced. ... We have a need to dispose of it responsibly in a safe, reliable, secure location, and that site is Ward Valley."

Wilson and U.S. Senate Republicans, with financial backing from the nuclear power industry, are fighting in federal court and in Congress to get the Ward Valley dump up and running.

Early next year, the Clinton administration plans to conduct safety tests to determine whether the Ward Valley site is leakproof — tests Wilson contends are not needed.

Low-level wastes, which California currently ships out of state, include contaminated clothing from power plants and needles, gloves and similar items from hospitals, industry and research facilities. They are considered less hazardous than high-level wastes like spent nuclear fuel rods or military bomb-making equipment.

A 1980 federal act required states to be responsible for handling the waste they generate and encouraged multistate compacts to build new dumps. At the time, political opposition by some states to handling outside wastes prompted threats to close the current dumps, leaving nowhere to put rising levels of waste.

But as debate over new dumps raged, "market forces have solved this problem," Hayden said.

His report, presented last month at the National Conference of State Legislatures in Washington, D.C., found that the annual volume of low-level waste shipped to disposal sites dropped between 1980 and 1996 to 422,000 cubic feet from 3.8 million cubic feet.

In California, the volume of waste dropped 94 percent to about 12,000 cubic feet, Hayden said.

The downward trend prompted officials to withdraw or reassess support for new dumps in Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio and Texas, all scheduled to be built after Ward Valley.

The decline means that the three current dump sites in Richland, Wash. Barnwell, S.C., and Clive, Utah, have anywhere from 29 to 260 years of capacity at current disposal rates, which probably will drop even further, Hayden said.

American Ecology Corp., a Boise, Idaho, company that holds the state license to operate Ward Valley, agreed there is overcapacity, but said the real issue is the 1980 act.

"It's not shortage of capacity that is prompting the efforts, it's an existing federal law ... the debate is academic," said Joe Nagel, chief operating officer. "Unless and until the Clinton administration decides to repeal the existing law, this is much ado about nothing."

Nagel said American Ecology has invested \$50 million in the past 12 years on the project and "we'll continue to pursue the site."

Hayden said Ward Valley, which would serve California, Arizona and North and South Dakota, is economically unsound because of the declining volume of waste.

Hayden estimated Ward Valley would need to charge \$2,500 per cubic foot to make money. Nagel said the Richland site charges \$62 per cubic foot.

Game and Parks Commission, said most of the geese are holding on Oahe Reservoir near Pierre, S.D. He said the birds will stay there as long as the food stays uncovered in the fields and until the reservoir freezes.

The unusual warmth up north has greatly affected the number of geese arriving in Nebraska. Last year's migration — which hit record numbers — was 250 percent higher than the previous year.

"We just don't have the numbers we had last year," Hoffman said.

There are still some birds that come south, regardless of the weather, Hoffman said. Goose hunters have had some success, although a little less than typical, he said.

Omaha may appeal shooting case

■ A Judge's order says victim's family can obtain any evidence of their son's death from the investigation.

OMAHA (AP) — The city was expected to file two appeals in an effort to fight a judge's order to hand over reports about the shooting of an Omaha man by a police officer.

"I believe this means that it stays the enforcement of the order until the appeal is determined," said Thomas Mumgaard, assistant city attorney. "That's at least what we're asking for."

Mumgaard said the appeals would be filed Wednesday afternoon in Douglas County District Court and the Nebraska Court of Appeals.

Douglas County Judge Edna Atkins ruled last week that Marvin Ammons' family was entitled to police reports, crime scene photographs and other evidence gathered in an investigation into her son's death.

Ammons, 33, was shot to death on Oct. 26 by officer-in-training Todd Sears. Police said Ammons approached police with a gun and refused to stop or drop his weapon. Critics have accused police of with-

holding information.

The judge ruled that Ammons' family has a legal right to the records.

Mumgaard has argued that turning the police records over to the family could violate a grand jury investigation of the shooting.

A Douglas County grand jury will meet in private at the end of December to review the shooting and determine whether Sears and his partner, Officer Troy Kister, acted properly or should be prosecuted.

Both the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's office also are investigating the shooting.

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Geese seem puzzled

Warmer weather sends them north

NORTH PLATTE (AP) — The sight of geese flying south during the fall is one of nature's sure signs that winter is drawing near.

But what does it mean when those same migrating birds are heading north during the fall?

That's the case with some Canada geese in the state who are confused by the recent fair weather in the Dakotas and Canada. The warm spell has enabled the geese to stay up north or actually linger over parts of Nebraska, returning north as they please.

The geese normally migrate from northern climates to southern areas in the winter months.

Rocky Hoffman, public information officer for the Nebraska