

What's more, the percentage of waste coming from the power plants will increase. Sixteen years from now the Connecticut Yankee plant in Haddam Neck is scheduled to be closed, the buildings torn down, even the earth beneath the building removed. Eventually, Millstone I, II and III will follow suit. Of all the low-level waste expected from Connecticut in the next 50 years, at least two-thirds will come from the decommissioning of power plants.

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Because the power plants create nearly all of the state's low-level waste, many people argue that Northeast Utilities should pay to build and run the waste facility. To some extent, that is already happening. Since 1988, the state has collected over \$4 million from the waste generators by assessing them on the volume of material they ship. (The money has been used to pay for studies and to hire a contractor to locate a site.) And the generators will continue to support the facility once it is open by paying a tipping fee. But the state plans to own the land and the facility, and hopes to get \$20 million in bonding from the Legislature this year to pay for the purchase.

There are those who are angered by this—they feel that the public should not have to pay to get rid of what is essentially Northeast Utilities' garbage. "What this amounts to is a subsidy to the nuclear power industry," says Joel Gordes, a former state representative from Colebrook who has worked on the low-level waste issue. "If they want us to pay for that, they should include it in their utility bills, not try to sneak it in through public funding."

Of even greater concern to Gordes and others is what will happen after the facility opens. As even the CHWMS admits, the long-term economics of placing a facility in Connecticut are at best uncertain. The problem dates back to the early 1980s, when the federal government first told states to deal with their own low-level waste. At the time, the government envisioned perhaps a dozen facilities nationally, with only one planned for all of New England, New York and New

Jersey. However, the politics of such a joint venture—starting with choosing the state for the site—proved insurmountable.

With each state in the region now having to build, and pay for, its own waste facility, the cost of disposing of the material has skyrocketed. How high, no one yet knows, but there is already speculation that the state will have to subsidize the facility to make it economically viable.

But if getting eight states to cooperate seemed like a political nightmare, the problem within Connecticut may even be worse. "We've got 169 very independent-minded towns in this state, and all of them are going to fight like hell to keep this facility out," says Fred Hurley, director of public works for Newtown. Hurley has monitored the low-level waste issue, hoping to prevent a repeat of what happened when his town was chosen as home for the state's new prison. "They can be as objective, as scientific, as apolitical as they want," he says, "but when it comes down to choosing one place, no one is going to believe it was not done for political reasons."

In fact, the CHWMS has gone to great lengths to make the selection process as apolitical as possible. It has established 50 pages worth of criteria describing what would make a site acceptable, and has agreed to keep the sites anonymous, at least until they've been narrowed down to three, and to select them purely on the basis of how well they measure up to the criteria.

For some, that's not good enough. "We think, for their own sake, that the siting board should not even know the name of the town they are selecting," says Norcen Cullen, executive director of the Connecticut Fund for the Environment and a member of the low-level waste board. "It's not that we don't trust them. It's just that they are human, and it will be almost impossible for them not to be influenced by knowing where the site is going to be."

To sidestep the political problem, the CHWMS has tried to get a town to volunteer; it has offered a benefits package that includes property-value guarantees and payment in lieu of taxes of around \$700,000 a year. But even that group acknowledges it's unlikely any town will step forward.

A more likely solution, some suggest, might be found back at the walkway over the spent fuel pool at Millstone. With nearly all of the state's radioactivity already sitting there in the pool, why not just leave it be and bring the rest of the state's waste to Millstone? This idea sounds particularly appealing when you remember that the plants there will be decommissioned sometime in the next 40 years. "The prospect of tearing down a nuclear-power plant, cutting it into pieces and transporting it to another place in the state to be disposed of not only seems dangerous, but ludicrous," says Judi Fried-

man, director of People's Action for Clean Energy, an anti-nuclear group.

Leaving the waste at the power plant would not only solve transportation problems, but defuse the political bomb. After all, the surrounding community is already living with far more dangerous material, in the form of the high-level waste stored there in the pool. And there are precedents. The Maine Yankee power plant, for instance, has already agreed to house that state's low-level waste.

The only stumbling block to such a solution, other than getting Northeast Utilities to agree to it, is Millstone's proximity to Long Island Sound. "It would be nice and simple if we could say, 'Yes, just leave the stuff right there,'" says the Connecticut Fund for the Environment's director Cullen. "But remember, this facility has to remain safe and stable for 500 years. I just don't know if we can do that with assurance along the Sound."

In fact, federal guidelines specifically state that the waste facility must be built beyond the ocean's "storm surge," the high-water mark reached by a 100-year hurricane at high tide. That's because even though nuclear power plants need water to operate, a low-level waste facility should be as impervious to water as possible. Just normal groundwater seeping into the facility and then carrying the radioactivity elsewhere poses the single largest threat to the area's human health and environment.

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Given that danger, there may be no place in the state where a low-level facility makes environmental sense. "It would be great if we had a nice big dry desert, like in California," says Charles Pelletier, in charge of low-level waste at the CHWMS, "but we don't." Instead, Connecticut has a moist climate subject to frequent freezing and thawing, precisely the conditions that make the long-term stability of a waste facility questionable.

In the past 30 years there have been three low-level facilities built in climates similar to Connecticut's—in New York, Ohio and Illinois. All have closed because they leaked waste into nearby streams, marshes or groundwater. The siting process today is much stricter than it was when those facilities were built in the 1960s, and the test