DUMP: 3 sites named finalists in search for radioactive storage

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The facility will consist of a series of concrete bunkers covered with earth. The waste management service claims that there will be no detectable radiation emitted from the facility, and that close monitoring will keep it safe for its centuries of use.

Some of the waste — lab equipment and clothing, paper towels and hospital sponges — has very little radioactivity. But other waste, such as equipment irradiated in nuclear reactors, is very "hot" and will remain a health hazard for centuries.

The state produces about 50,000 cubic feet of the waste a year. The state's four nuclear power plants produce about 70 percent of the volume and 99 percent of the radioactivity. The plants, owned by Northeast Utilities, also produce about 60 percent of the state's electricity.

The state now ships this waste to disposal sites in South Carolina, Washington and Nevada. But by 1993, these sites will probably close their doors to outsiders. By federal law, each state will then have to find its own site to store the wastes.

The hazardous waste management service, a quasi-public agency appointed by the Legislature to develop the site, started out by studying about 700 sites. Over the past three months, the service and its consultant, Battelle Memorial Institute of Columbus, Ohio, narrowed that list down to eight. This weekend, the service's board of directors chose the final three.

The board chose the sites based on geological data without knowing which town they were in. Ronald Gingerich, director of the service's low-level radioactive waste program, said that soil and water tests will let the service determine the final site before the year's end.

The town chosen will get a percentage of the tipping fees of the site. Cohen estimated this to be at least $750,000 a year. The town will also get a payment in lieu of taxes, $150,000 to mitigate the problems of the site, $100,000 to help local reviews of the project, a property value guarantee for five years to offset any loss of property values and money to hire a full-time town employee to monitor the site for the town.

But such promises seemed to hold little allure to Landmann.

"The people I talked to that live next to the sites reacted very negatively," he said. "It's going to take a lot more than $750,000 to change people's minds. That's just a drop in the bucket. We'd need millions."

