Nuclear Waste Plan May Impact County

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spent fuel rods, which are considered high-level waste.

The new legislation "applies more stringent criteria" to the siting process and issues such as water supplies are "critical to rural areas as well," Mr. Rennie said. "For the past 10 months, the [CHWMS] has had no one overseeing it. Now the legislature will oversee it and that is a change for the better."

The legislature, he added, decided that the bill had a better chance of passing without the requirement for temporary storage at Millstone. He said that power plant sites will be considered and any specific plans and candidate sites will be subject to legislative approval.

Sharon Together Against a Nuclear Dump, the grass-roots organization that worked to eliminate the Sharon site from consideration, has not issued an opinion on the bill's impact. Robert Finn, STAND's chairman, is skeptical about its merit since he has pushed for siting a temporary facility at power plant property.

"We are still trying to understand the bill," he said. Though a new site selection plan may emphasize rural areas more, a significant amount of county land would not qualify because of its physical characteristics.

"So many of the sites they looked at didn't meet the [Nuclear Regulatory Commission] criteria," he said. "You could be out in the middle of nowhere and the site isn't suitable technically. It doesn't make any difference if you're in a rural area."

STAND has maintained that the fractured bedrock throughout northwestern Connecticut would fail to support a radioactive waste dump because the land makes it difficult to track how water would flow from the site and to determine the potential for radioactive material to seep into cracks in the marble.

In addition, the 285-acre Sharon site sits atop a productive aquifer, which means it would also fail to meet N.R.C. standards, according to STAND.

Mrs. Ends said that she supported the bill because it is "a step in the right direction" that attempts to convince the Federal Government that there is no suitable waste site within the densely populated state.

Federal law says that existing low-level radioactive waste disposal sites in South Carolina, Nevada and Washington can refuse to accept out-of-state waste as of Jan. 1, 1993. Then, as of Jan. 1, 1996, waste generators that can no longer find a disposal facility may require their states to assume liability for the waste.

The law is being reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court, based on a challenge by New York and Connecticut, claiming that a law which asks each state to designate its own radioactive waste site is unconstitutional and violates states' rights.

Ms. LaVoie said that "a lot of people believe that the Supreme Court will overturn the law," which will force a nationwide reexamination of the disposal process. She has maintained that the anti-nuclear crusade is not simply a "Not in My Backyard" reaction, but an attempt to get the nuclear power industry to become responsible for waste disposal.

The N.R.C. only permits on-site storage of low-level waste for a five years and prohibits long-term disposal because it would "detract from the main responsibility of the operators," according to the CHWMS. Connecticut's generators primarily ship waste to the Barnwell, S.C., disposal facility.

The legislature in South Carolina is still considering whether to keep its dump open to out-of-state generators after the 1993 deadline.

Ms. LaVoie added that Connecticut site selection changes distract the focus from the state's main problem—its excessive dependence on nuclear energy. The state ranks first in the country in the percentage of its electricity—45 percent—that is derived from nuclear power.

Noreen Cullen, the former director of Connecticut Fund for the Environment who resigned from the CHWMS advisory committee last May, said that the site selection changes are ones that she advocated more than a year ago, before the final candidate sites were announced.

"The fact that we're able to get this loose train off the track really is a big step in itself," she said. "We have a chance to go back and really strengthen the criteria and do things correctly."

Both Ms. LaVoie and Ms. Cullen agree in predicting that no suitable site in Connecticut will be found, and that the Federal law will eventually have to be changed.

The Supreme Court is expected to issue a decision by this July.

The legislative changes were ordered in January by Gov. Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., following advisory reports from the commissioners of the state agriculture and environmental protection departments which raised several questions on the suitability of the top candidate sites.