

What others are saying ▼**Nuclear Waste “Fear Factor”:
Recent Report Says Risks Are Small**

Those of us who see energy independence as a key national priority should be cheered by a recent report about nuclear waste. A panel of scientists has approved of federal plans to ship tens of thousands of tons of waste from nuclear power plants for disposal in a Nevada mountain. The scientists’ thorough review of the Energy Department’s plans find that transportation and disposal of the spent fuel poses “no fundamental technical barriers” and carries low and easily manageable risks.

That’s heartening news, especially since it comes from a independent panel put together not by the DOE but by the National Research Council, part of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences.

If the United States is ever going to make progress toward energy independence by severing or diminishing its link to imported oil, we must consider expanding nuclear power production, a viable alternative that to many re-

mains unpalatable and frightening. The biggest obstacle to enlarging the nation’s nuclear capacity is still the challenge of where and how to dispose safely of nuclear waste.

The Energy Department has designated Yucca Mountain in the Nevada desert, 90 miles from Las Vegas, as the site where spent fuel from 70 power plants in 31 states would be stored, entombed in concrete and metal canisters capable of withstanding any conceivable seismic shock or military strike. But the plan has been under attack from environmentalists and anti-nuclear power activists who say the shipments could trigger uncontrollable nuclear accidents or be subject to terrorism.

The council’s report shows such concerns are unwarranted and the risks minimal. The panel acknowledged, however, that the biggest obstacle to the plans is the “fear factor,” a psychological and political barrier that the nation’s energy consumers must overcome if we are to strive for energy independence.—*from an editorial in Newsday, February 14, 2006* ■