

11. POLICY POSITION

SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL AND HIGH-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

Spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste management remains a major issue which is in need of resolution by the federal government. Nuclear power plants located in the southern states are facing a serious depletion of spent fuel storage space. By the end of this decade, 16 reactors in the states of Arkansas, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia will have exhausted the space in their spent fuel storage pools, and by 2010, when a federal repository is scheduled to commence operations, 34 reactors in 11 southern states will have had to expand their storage capacity.

Congress enacted the Nuclear Waste Policy Act in 1982 to codify the responsibility of the Department of Energy (DOE) to provide for the safe and timely acceptance of spent nuclear fuel by 1998, in exchange for payment by electric utility ratepayers into the Nuclear Waste Fund. Since 1983, ratepayers nationwide have paid more than \$8 billion into the fund, and ratepayers in southern states have paid over \$2.6 billion into the Fund. Instead of appropriating adequate funds to sustain progress in the DOE Waste Program, Congress has been using surpluses in the Nuclear Waste Fund and the annual fees to offset the federal budget deficit.

RECOMMENDATION

The Southern Legislative Conference believes that DOE has a responsibility to begin accepting spent fuel from utilities in 1998. Therefore, the federal government must immediately establish a process to develop an integrated spent fuel management system and find a site for interim, centralized storage as a part of that system.

Compensation to utilities in exchange for spent nuclear fuel storage at plant sites without a commitment to move fuel off site for centralized management does not satisfy DOE's responsibility to accept spent fuel by 1998. It only serves to delay a solution to this national environmental issue.

The Southern Legislative Conference strongly recommends that DOE initiate the necessary management improvements to ensure that it can make timely progress in the characterization of the proposed repository site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, in a fiscally sound manner. To resolve issues of site suitability, Congress must increase funding for fiscal year 1995 and subsequent years to allow critical scientific and engineering studies to progress on schedule.

Adopted by the Southern Legislative Conference, July 19, 1994, Norfolk, Virginia.