



# SNAKE RIVER ALLIANCE

IDAHO'S NUCLEAR WATCHDOG & CLEAN ENERGY ADVOCATE

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## **Spent fuel FAQs we wish had been asked and answered**

There have been a number of editorials and guest opinions in Idaho newspapers since the start of the year regarding the Department of Energy's desire to ship two batches of commercial spent nuclear fuel to Idaho. As has often been the case during nuclear controversies in Idaho, many of the supporters of the shipments are from eastern Idaho, what the Idaho Falls paper calls "INL Country." Elsewhere, opposition seems fairly high.

### **How much money would come to Idaho if the Governor and Attorney General allow the two shipments?**

It's hard to tell. Supporters of the shipments seem to have settled on \$20 million per year, or as the head of the Idaho Department of Commerce wrote, "about \$100 million to Idaho during the next five years." In a December 16, 2014, letter to the Governor, the Manager of the DOE-Idaho office estimated that the shipment to support joint work with South Korea on pyroprocessing would mean "\$10-20 M per year through approximately 2021." But current annual funding for the project is about \$7 million, and it seems to be holding steady. In his letter to the Governor, the DOE-Idaho Manager also informed him that the shipment of high burnup spent fuel sister rods will mean about \$1 million to \$2 million for each of the next 3 to 4 years. The sister rod shipment is far more controversial because it might attract 20 tons additional spent fuel in the next several years. Based on these documents, it looks as if a fair amount of the cited funding would not be *new* money, and that the total is at or below the low end of the DOE's stated estimate.

### **How many jobs would the two shipments bring to Idaho if they were allowed?**

According to the DOE's draft analysis of the two shipments, they "would not change workforce requirements and would not notably impact socioeconomic resources in the region of influence."

### **Is the Idaho National Laboratory the best place for this work to be done?**

Idaho's ban on commercial spent nuclear fuel shipments is the strongest of any in the country, and the federal government agreed to that ban in 1995. Despite that, INL has spent significant resources in the last several years upgrading its facilities to allow it to accept the banned material. Those were not good faith efforts and appear to have been intended to strengthen the rationale for compromising the commercial spent fuel ban and to pressure the State into accepting the shipments. The upgrades have also been difficult to track. For instance, in April 2014, the Snake River Alliance submitted a Freedom of Information Act Request after we read in the DOE FY 2015 budget request to Congress that it wanted money "to implement the adaptations that are determined to be necessary to use existing Idaho National Laboratory (INL) facilities to

handle large transportation casks” like those that would be used for commercial spent fuel. In July 2014 we received the DOE’s response: 5 documents totaling 69 pages – every one of which had been blacked out or withheld.



Handling a spent fuel cask at North Anna in Virginia. The DOE wants to send high burnup fuel from this reactor to Idaho.

### **Why is there a link between INL cleanup progress and DOE spent fuel shipments to the Site in the 1995 Settlement Agreement?**

Cleanup at INL is mandated and controlled by the Superfund law (CERCLA) and the hazardous waste law (RCRA and its Idaho equivalent, the Hazardous Waste Management Act). The link in the 1995 Settlement Agreement is not, as shipment supporters complain, a way of “punishing” the Site for cleanup shortfalls. It is instead a way for the State to have a role in managing the risks the Site poses to Idaho, which is particularly important since no one can regulate the radioactive portion of DOE waste. For instance, the latest effort to start the Integrated Waste Treatment Unit had to be suspended in mid-August. No one in Idaho wants to “punish” DOE for that, but we all recognize it means a significant, present risk remains unabated.

### **Is the 1995 Settlement Agreement out of date?**

No. The Settlement Agreement is 20 years old and is designed to help manage material that will remain hazardous until the end of time. Furthermore, most of the more significant deadlines are still some time out; efforts to meet them should continue.

**Access more information from [bbrailsford@snakeriveralliance.org](mailto:bbrailsford@snakeriveralliance.org) or here:  
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