WHAT ABOUT THE WASTE?

What is Nuclear Waste?

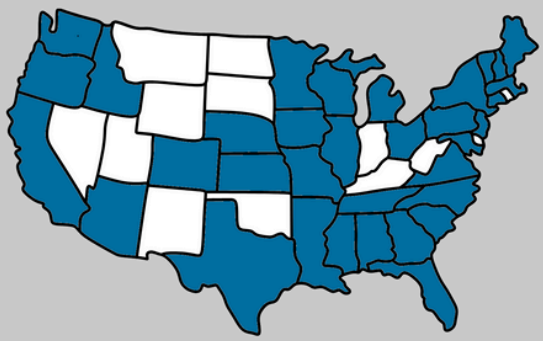
Generating energy with nuclear power creates a small amount of waste. Typically, the term "nuclear waste" refers to spent nuclear fuel. This is simply fuel that's been used in a reactor for about 5 years, after which it no longer efficiently sustains a chain reaction. Despite being labeled "waste," spent nuclear fuel still holds significant energy potential and could be recycled into fresh fuel.

How is Nuclear Waste Managed?

Once nuclear fuel is considered "spent," it is removed from the reactor and placed in steel-lined concrete pools filled with water to cool. It takes about 2 to 5 years for the fuel to cool before it can be transferred to dry storage casks. These specially designed casks are made of steel and concrete. They provide secure, long-term storage and are safe enough to touch.

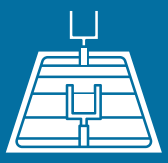
Where is Nuclear Waste Stored?

The nation's spent nuclear fuel is stored safely and securely at the sites where it was generated. There are currently more than 70 sites in 35 states hosting spent nuclear fuel. Spent nuclear fuel can safely remain at these sites for the foreseeable future, or until we can find a permanent storage site.

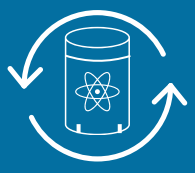


States currently storing spent nuclear fuel from commercial nuclear reactors.

Spent nuclear fuel is a solid not a liquid.



The energy density of nuclear fuel means there's a small amount of waste.



Spent nuclear fuel could be recycled into fresh fuel.

Total Amount of Nuclear Waste

The U.S. generates about 2,000 metric tons of spent fuel annually. That may sound like a lot, but we've been generating electricity with reactors since the 1950s, and if all the fuel were stacked together on a football field, it wouldn't even reach the 10-yard line.

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