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Thursday, Oct 31, 2002

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Concerns voiced about shipping spent nuclear fuel

BRUCE HENDERSON
Staff Writer

Shipments of used nuclear fuel from Charlotte-area power plants to the federal government's proposed disposal site in Yucca Mountain, Nev., would expose the public to unacceptable levels of radiation, an advocacy group claimed Tuesday.

Accidents, sabotage or exposure to radiation from inside shipping containers threaten the public, said the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. The group exhibited a full-size model of a huge, dumbbell-shaped container in which spent fuel is transported.

A Duke Power spokesman defended the safety of used-fuel shipments.

Citing a 1995 study by the state of Nevada, which opposes the Yucca Mountain project, the Blue Ridge group said an estimated 193 rail shipments would leave Duke Power's Catawba nuclear plant on Lake Wylie over the life of Yucca Mountain. An additional 211 rail shipments would leave the McGuire plant on Lake Norman, it said.

Used fuel could also be shipped by trucks, it said.

People stuck in traffic alongside a shipping container could be exposed to 30 to 50 millirems of radiation, the group said. "This waste is too hot and too deadly to travel through our communities," said the group's Louis Zeller.

Used-fuel shipping containers are designed to limit radiation to 10 millirems per hour at a distance of about two yards, said Duke spokesman Tim Pettit. A typical dental X-ray exposes patients to about 10 millirems, he said.

Any number of shipping container designs, with different capacities, could ship used fuel to Yucca Mountain, Pettit said. Duke safely shipped 300 used-fuel assemblies from its Oconee plant near Seneca, S.C., to McGuire in the 1980s, he said.

Despite years of such shipments nationwide, Pettit said, no accident has ever resulted in the breach of a used-fuel container.

S.C. WIRE FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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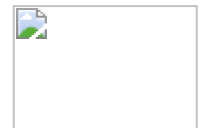
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