



**Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future
Public Meeting on Its Draft Report to the Secretary of Energy
Atlanta, Georgia
October 18, 2011**

On October 18, 2011, the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future (BRC) held the second in a series of public forums to discuss its draft report to the Secretary of Energy in Atlanta, Georgia. The purpose of the forum was to provide an opportunity for interested and affected parties to comment on the BRC's draft report. The BRC was formed by the Secretary of Energy at the request of the President to conduct a comprehensive review of policies for managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle and recommend a new strategy. The draft report highlights the Commission's findings and conclusions to date and articulates a preliminary set of consensus recommendations for public review and input.

During the afternoon, approximately 65 participants joined breakout sessions to discuss the report's recommendations in more detail. Participants were divided equally between the breakout groups and distributed to provide a diverse cross-section of viewpoints in each discussion. The four sessions (with between 15-20 persons in each session) lasted for an hour and a half—the time was shortened somewhat to make allowance for the high number of people who signed up for public comment. The breakout groups focused on the major topics addressed in the draft report and discussed in the morning panel sessions:

- Policy implications for consolidated vs. on-site interim storage options;
- Development of a consent-based siting process;
- Radioactive waste transportation system planning and stakeholder cooperation; and

Below is a brief high-level summary of the key points from the breakout sessions.

Consent-Based Siting Process

- The consent-based siting process needs to include a stronger, more effective public participation process.
- The roles of the various levels of government need to be clarified in each siting process, since different government agencies at the state, tribal, and local levels have different capacities, strengths, and weaknesses. Each siting process needs to identify how relevant authorities can effectively contribute to the siting decisions. Because local government is most times closer to the day-to-day lives of citizens and thus more trusted by the public, their role in particular needs to be clarified early in the siting process.
- Some participants argued that local consent to site waste storage and disposal facilities must also come with a responsibility to have appropriate responsibilities for the facility of the site, including the security of the site, and the protection of public health and the environment.
- Some participants were concerned that the notion of consent-based siting ignores the need for site safety and suitability to be based primarily on science, not consent. Sites must be geologically suitable for storage and disposal, and that determination must in the first place be a scientific one, not one primarily based on consent.
- Many participants argued for de-politicization of the siting process and using science-based determinations to make final decisions on site identification and selection.
- Independent, citizen-based monitoring should occur in conjunction with, but separate from, traditional monitoring by federal and state agencies. This process can help build capacity and understanding of issues associated with nuclear waste storage, transport, and disposal, and can help build trust among all parties by creating a common base of information about the operations of the facility.
- A general education of all engaged parties needs to take place. In addition to efforts to create a common base of knowledge that all citizens can use as a starting point for understanding issues related to storage and disposal (and nuclear power issues in general), some participants suggested that the BRC consider increasing public participation through national forums to discuss specific issues over time as a way of building trust among stakeholders.

Transportation

- Some participants noted that the US has thus far had a successful track record for transport of nuclear spent fuel and waste without major incident. Much work has gone into studying nuclear waste transport; the BRC should recommend that federal agencies support continued research, monitoring, and evaluation to build upon that knowledge to continually improve the system going forward.
- The BRC should make recommendations regarding upgrades to transportation infrastructure. Specifically, the BRC should encourage a process where the Departments of Energy and Department of Transportation work with state governments and private railroad companies to begin to identify improvements needed so that these wastes can be safely transported from their place of origin to new storage and disposal facilities.
- Worker health, safety, and overall security are issues that have not received significant attention in the draft BRC report. The final report should address these concerns.
- Communities along proposed and existing transport routes need to be informed of the risks associated with that transport, as well as the probabilities of those risks, so that they can make informed decisions about allowing transport through their communities under a consent-based approach.

Consolidated vs. Onsite Interim Storage Options

- Some participants agreed that spent fuel and waste (particularly that waste older than five years) needs to be moved from current storage pools and into dry cask storage as soon as possible, with the intention of moving those casks to long term disposal sites as soon as practicable. If waste is to remain on some sites, that waste should be placed in hardened storage.
- Any attempts to site and develop consolidated interim storage facilities must be coupled with a long-term disposal solution; some participants believe that Yucca Mountain is still the most realistic site for a long-term repository for nuclear waste.
- Some participants believed that consolidated interim storage is not a viable solution, primarily voicing concerns about security and costs. They argued

- that such an approach will require movement of spent fuel twice, which poses extra security risks, and requires additional costs. These participants suggested that the spent fuel may be more secure if hardened in its current place as opposed to being transported. The BRC should help clarify the costs associated with interim storage and use that understanding to justify the best storage and disposal options for specific cases.
- The BRC report needs to clarify the term “interim”. Specifically, participants want clarity on the time dimension of “interim” storage (i.e., 5 year, 10 years 100 years), as well as the purpose and desired outcome of interim storage; most participants that raised this concern believed that the conclusion of an interim storage process should result in moving the site back to “greenfield” condition.
 - The BRC should recommend that state agencies be engaged early in the process when discussing transportation of spent nuclear fuel and waste. State authorities will need to be engaged in the decisions on route identification, security, and infrastructure improvement and maintenance. Because state governments are often more trusted than their federal counterparts, they can be invaluable in communicating with local communities and helping to build a sense of cooperation among all interested parties.
 - The BRC needs to investigate the risks associated with direct hits on storage facilities by natural disasters (tornado, earthquake, hurricane, flood) and communicate this information to the public.

Other Thoughts

The BRC should recommend that DOE and NRC develop additional long term studies on the human health impacts of radiation, spent nuclear fuel, and nuclear waste.

Several participants noted that the discussion of nuclear power needs to happen within the context of a national energy strategy. They argued that many conversations about specific energy types (nuclear, renewables, coal, natural gas, etc.) occur individually, without a broader understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of those forms when compared to one another. Such an understanding is necessary to understand the future of nuclear power and to identify appropriate actions to address waste storage and disposal issues.