

Union of Concerned Scientists

Tell Oregon House Committee on Energy & Environment: No Loopholes for Radioactive Waste

Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Johnson, Vice-Chair Power, and Members of the House Committee on Energy and Environment,

I strongly urge you to reject SB 990 and protect the health of Oregonians from the threat of nuclear waste.

In 1980, Oregonians voted to require that statewide voter approval and a permanent disposal site is built for the highly radioactive and long-lived waste it generates, before any new nuclear power plants be built in the state. Nearly 40 years later there is still no permanent disposal site established for high-level radioactive waste – yet SB 990 in Oregon's State Legislature would allow some types of nuclear power plants to be built.

The extremely difficult problem of safely storing nuclear waste that remains lethal for centuries and dangerous for millennia has not been solved. Senate Bill 990 is a bill that would create a special exemption from Oregon's 1980 voter-passed moratorium on nuclear power plant construction for small modular reactors. Instead of requiring a statewide vote, the bill would allow cities and counties to vote for nuclear reactors of 300 megawatts or less without a permanent repository for the high-level radioactive waste they would create.

The proposed smaller reactors create the same kind of high-level radioactive waste generated at Oregon's now-closed nuclear power plant, Trojan (1,000 megawatts) created. The orphaned waste from Trojan still sits in heavily shielded casks on a concrete pad next to the Columbia River, awaiting permanent disposal. Should the shielding fail for any reason, workers would receive a lethal dose of radiation within minutes even though the plant has been closed for more than two decades.

We have a moral obligation to protect the Oregonians from the health and financial impacts of the generation of more nuclear waste that we still have no plan to safely dispose. Add your name to our sign-on letter to tell your legislators to reject Senate Bill 990 and keep our nuclear waste protections intact.

Sincerely,

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SB 990 – Exempts small modular reactors from certain siting restrictions that apply to nuclear-fueled thermal power plants. Requires small modular reactors to be sited in a city or county where the electors have approved of small modular reactors being located. Requires emergency planning zones for small modular reactors to be located in a county where the electors have approved of their location. Requires proposed disposal of high-level radioactive waste by small modular reactors to comport with the process approved or adopted by the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission

By allowing the passage of this bill is a serious violation of the true environmental standards we (Oregonians) have fought to protect.

To allow those who want to create random “backyard” nuclear power plants on private property with no regard to the impact on the health of their family, neighbors, all those within miles around them, and our planet is blatantly ludicrous, naive, and selfish. Also, to turn your backs on those who already have resorted to this source of power for their household or business is a serious violation of Oregon environmental standards. Those who proposed this law obviously must be in violation of our current standards or this HB/SB and would not be on the agenda. I find this very disturbing.

To absolve those who may have already resorted to nuclear (modular reactors) as a source of power in Oregon is a violation of all this state stands for. This is a serious violation of the law. To also exempt those who resort to (or have resorted to) this method of power to destroy every air breathing person, animal, plant on this planet is beyond comprehension.

How could you entertain such a proposal of this magnitude without weighing the dramatic impact this could have on all of us? We Oregonians are violating the law when we burn wood in our stoves on days the weather is stagnant and in some places wood stoves are outlawed altogether; however, using a nuclear power plant on our private property is acceptable and does not violate the law? What a sick concept!

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