



CITY COUNCIL
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Michael Cathcart
Council Member District 1

September 26, 2024

The Honorable David Turk
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20585

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary, U.S. Department of
Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Mr. Casey Sixkiller
Regional Administrator, Region 10
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Sixth Ave, Suite 155
Seattle, WA 98102

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
U.S. House of Representatives
2188 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Deputy Secretary Turk, Secretary Buttigieg, Mr. Sixkiller, Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell, and Representative McMorris Rodgers:

As the senior Council Member of the Spokane City Council, I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the proposed transportation of Hanford's liquid radioactive waste through the City of Spokane. While I am a strong supporter of nuclear power as a vital component of our clean energy future—particularly the safe, reliable advancements of modern small modular reactors—the transportation of nuclear waste, especially in liquid form, requires the utmost caution and public accountability.

First, let me be clear: This is not an issue of competing state interests; it is an issue of public safety. It is alarming that while Oregon successfully lobbied to have nuclear waste shipments bypass their state, Washington has been left vulnerable, with cities like Spokane directly in the path of these hazardous materials. It defies logic to suggest that avoiding rural areas of Oregon somehow results in a safer route through Spokane, a highly populated urban center. The primary goal of any transport plan involving nuclear waste should be to **maximize the avoidance of population centers**, regardless of state boundaries.

Given this, I have several critical questions:

- ▲ Why was Spokane chosen as part of the transport route instead of other, less populated alternatives? Was a thorough analysis conducted to evaluate the feasibility of bypassing Spokane and other population centers?
- ▲ What specific routes will be used for the transportation of nuclear waste through Spokane County? Will this involve highways, local roads, or rail lines? Please provide detailed maps and descriptions. Please also describe alternate routes not considered and the reasons why.
- ▲ Why has Oregon been able to secure protection for their state's population, while Spokane and Washington have not? What factors were considered in prioritizing state-based concerns over the safety of major population centers? What roles have both Washington's and Oregon's Governors played in this process to date?

The Risks

The fact that we are discussing **liquid radioactive waste** makes this situation all the more precarious. Unlike substances like coal or oil, liquid radioactive material presents a unique and significant danger. A single accident or spill could contaminate the **Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer**, a critical source of drinking water for hundreds of thousands of residents. The potential risks extend far beyond those who might come into immediate contact with a spill.

Given the risks involved, I ask:

- ▲ What are the differences in health and environmental impacts between exposure to liquid versus solid nuclear waste? Are the risks from liquid waste significantly higher than those of solidified waste in the event of a spill or accident?
- ▲ Has an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) been conducted that assesses whether solid waste would offer greater safety?
- ▲ What are the current radiation levels associated with the liquid form of this waste compared to solid waste? Would solidification reduce the potential for radiation exposure during accidents or spills? To what degree?
- ▲ What are the current radiation levels associated with the liquid form of this waste compared to solid waste? Would solidification reduce the potential for radiation exposure during accidents or spills? To what degree?
- ▲ In the event of a spill of liquid waste over a water way or the aquifer, how quickly would contamination spread, what are the factors to consider? If in a solid form it were to enter a waterway, would contamination spread and how quickly?

If the decision has indeed been made to transport nuclear waste through Spokane County, I implore you to use **rail transport and not put nuclear waste on our roadways**.

Freight rail is the safest means of ground transportation. Rail lines generally avoid dense population centers and carry a lower risk of accidents compared to highways like **Interstate 90**,

which is heavily trafficked. Given the dangerous nature of this material, the thought of hundreds of trucks carrying nuclear waste alongside commuter traffic is simply unacceptable.

That said, I request clarification on the following points:

- ▲ What mode of transport is being proposed—truck or rail? What are the safety considerations and protocols in place for each option?
- ▲ If trucks are used, what safeguards will be implemented to ensure the safety of residents and commuters? Will these shipments be scheduled to avoid peak traffic hours, and what will be the technical specifications of the tanks to protect the public?
- ▲ If rail transport is used, what are the technical specifications of the containment units? Are containers fully leak-proof, and can they contain radiation under all conditions?
- ▲ In the event of a crash, how are the railcars or trucks designed to protect the public and the environment from radioactive exposure? What measures are in place to ensure the containment system holds, even in the worst-case scenario?
- ▲ Do these materials hold any value to bad actors? Are security measures necessary and/or planned regarding the transport of these materials?

Beyond these concerns, the lack of public outreach regarding this plan is **unacceptable**. My Spokane constituents deserve transparency and the opportunity to voice our concerns.

I formally request **local public hearings** on this matter. The absence of public information and involvement up to this point only heightens the sense that this decision has been made without adequate local input.

Public Outreach Process

There are very specific legal requirements for public outreach that apply to the transport of nuclear waste. I further ask:

- ▲ Why has there been no formal public outreach or hearing process to inform our Spokane residents of the risks and details of this plan?

Federal law clearly provides Spokane with the right to engage in **legal coordination** on issues of national significance that impact our jurisdiction. Under **42 U.S.C. § 4332** (National Environmental Policy Act - NEPA), local governments must be consulted when federal decisions significantly affect their environment. I demand that Spokane be included in a **formal coordination process** with the Department of Energy (DOE) regarding the transport of nuclear waste through our city. This is not merely a matter of preference—it is a legal obligation. Coordination ensures that Spokane's residents are protected and that our local concerns are fully integrated into federal decision-making.

Moreover, under the **Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968 (31 U.S.C. § 6506)**, federal agencies are required to engage in "maximum coordination" with local governments when federal actions impact local communities. This applies to both the **Department of Energy**

(DOE) and the **Department of Transportation (DOT)**, which oversee the transportation of hazardous materials like nuclear waste.

In this context, I must ask:

- ▲ How will the Department of Energy and the Department of Transportation fulfill their obligations under the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act to consult and coordinate with the City of Spokane? What formal steps are being taken to ensure Spokane's input is integrated into these decisions?

Spokane's policies, specifically those outlined in **Chapter 18.09 of the Spokane Municipal Code**, must be respected. The code clearly seeks to "limit exposure of its residents to high-level nuclear waste." Specifically, **SMC 18.09.030(C)** prohibits activities that expose Spokane residents to the risks of high-level nuclear materials.

Given this legal framework, I ask:

- ▲ What steps are being taken to ensure that Spokane's municipal code, which limits exposure to high-level nuclear waste, is being properly coordinated with federal authorities during the transport planning process? Will federal agencies comply with local ordinances, and how will this be enforced?

The decision to transport liquid radioactive waste through Spokane without adequate consideration of local safety standards or proper coordination is unacceptable. As a sitting Council Member, I have a duty to advocate for the safety of my constituents, and I will not allow Spokane to be ignored in this process. The failure to engage Spokane in **formal legal coordination** would violate federal law and I insist that our community's voice be heard in these critical decisions.

I demand immediate legal coordination between the Department of Energy, Department of Transportation, and the City of Spokane in addition to public hearings to address the numerous questions surrounding this plan. Spokane's residents have a right to know the risks and to have our concerns considered before any further action is taken. **The safety of our community depends on it.**

I look forward to your prompt response and commitment to ensuring that this process moves forward transparently and responsibly.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Cathcart

Spokane City Council, District 1

Cc: Governor Jay Inslee

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Senator Andy Billig

Rep. Timm Ormsby

Rep. Marcus Riccelli

Rep. Jenny Graham

Rep. Mike Volz

Senator Jeff Holy

Rep. Leonard Christian

Rep. Suzanne Schmidt

Senator Mike Padden

Dr. Francisco Velazquez

Mayor Lisa Brown

Spokane City Council

Spokane County Commissioners