

**COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP**

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## **California Waste Generators' Access to Nuclear Dump Assured by South Carolina Supreme Court Ruling**

**No Radioactive Waste "Piling Up" in California for Lack of Disposal Site Plenty of Time  
Available to Address Unresolved Ward Valley Safety Issues**

California waste generators' continued access to the Barnwell radioactive waste disposal site was assured last week when the South Carolina Supreme Court upheld the state legislature's 1995 decision to reopen the Barnwell facility to wastes from throughout the nation. California now has plenty of time to resolve troubling safety questions about the proposed Ward Valley nuclear waste dump.

"Not an ounce of radioactive waste is 'piling up' in California because of lack of access to a disposal facility," said Dr. Joseph Lyou of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, a Los Angeles-based public interest group critical of the proposed Ward Valley dump. "It's uncanny how often the nuclear industry repeats the 'it's piling up' lie," said Dr. Lyou. "It's their favorite mantra, but it's also dead wrong. The truth is that California radioactive waste generators continue to be able to send their wastes to South Carolina and Utah."

The South Carolina dump reopened to wastes from California and other states in mid-1995. As of late January 1996, the Southwestern Compact Commission had approved the shipment of more than 24,000 cubic feet of waste to Barnwell from Compact states, which include California, Arizona, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Moreover, by the end of January, an additional 147,250 cubic feet of waste had been

- approved for shipment to Envirocare in Utah, a separate facility that accepts certain types of radioactive waste from California and the rest of the nation.

A review of disposal costs shows that it costs less to dispose of wastes in South Carolina and Utah than is projected for the proposed Ward Valley facility. The Barnwell facility alone has the capacity for at least 10 year's worth of the nation's waste.

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“While we do not necessarily support continued operation of Barnwell, it is nonetheless an established fact,” said Dr. Lyou. “The proponents of Ward Valley should stop misleading the public with claims that waste is stacking up in California for want of access to a disposal facility.”

“There is no crisis and no need to cut corners in resolving the critical safety questions involved in dumping vast quantities of highly radioactive waste in unlined trenches near the Colorado River, the main water source of drinking water for tens of millions of people,” said Dr. Lyou. “There is plenty of time to address unresolved safety issues without making an irreversible mistake, one we may well come to regret.”

“The proposed Ward Valley contractor has operated nuclear dumps in Illinois, Kentucky, and Nevada, all of which have experienced radioactive leakage,” said Dr. Lyou. “The unlined trench design proposed for Ward Valley is the most primitive used anywhere in the world except China. One cannot even dispose of normal municipal trash in unlined trenches in California,” he said.

Ward Valley proponents have tried to create the impression that waste is piling up in California. They fail to mention that not a single California radioactive waste generator is storing waste for lack of a disposal facility. Both the South Carolina and Utah facilities are open for California wastes, and California wastes are being shipped to those facilities on a regular basis.

Confronted with this fact, the nuclear industry often falls back on claims that, although Barnwell is open, some waste generators do not want to ship there because of potential liability resulting from possible leakage of the dump’s unlined trenches –the very design proposed for Ward Valley. They say they worry that Barnwell may someday be designated a Superfund site, like US Ecology’s dump in Kentucky. “What an exhibition of twisted logic!” said Dr. Lyou. “Ward Valley dump supporters argue that we must hurry and dump nuclear wastes in unlined trenches near the Colorado River because unlined trenches have leaked elsewhere. This just proves that Ward Valley will leak too.”

“Low-level” radioactive waste is not “low-risk” waste. It includes virtually all radioactive waste from nuclear reactors except irradiated fuel. It includes such items as highly irradiated piping and the filters that collect radioactive material that leaks out of the fuel~ during operation. Nuclear reactors will generate more than 90% of the radioactivity of the waste to be disposed of at Ward Valley. Medical and biotech waste generators will contribute about 0.1% of the Ward Valley wastes.

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*Attached: article from S. Carolina about Barnwell court decision*