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New Map Shows Expanse Of U.S. Nuclear Waste Sites



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From Chicago, I write about climate change, green technology, energy.



Compiled by the Congressional Research Service using various U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Nuclear Energy Institute sources. No nuclear waste storage sites are located in Alaska or Hawaii. CRS

The United States is home to 21 “stranded” nuclear-waste storage sites, according to a congressional researcher who was quick to add that “stranded does not imply that the waste has been abandoned or lacks regulatory oversight.”

It means those 21 sites are no longer attached to reactors that are producing electricity or revenue, environmental policy analyst Lance N. Larson writes in a [May report](#) to members of Congress. The stranded sites are costly for the federal government, which

has spent \$7.4 billion to nuclear utilities and other reactor owners, according to CRS, to offset its responsibility to store the waste.

The 21 are among 80 sites Larsen drew together in a map that shows where the country's nuclear waste is distributed while it awaits construction of a permanent repository.

"No country, including the United States, has a permanent geologic repository for disposal of commercial SNF (spent nuclear fuel) and other HLW (high-level waste). Currently, commercial nuclear power plants generally store SNF on site, awaiting disposal in a permanent repository," Larsen writes.

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Larsen created the map for members of Congress to aid them in locating [interim storage facilities](#) to take the waste from commercial reactor sites and hold it until a permanent repository opens.

Larsen's map includes spent nuclear fuel from reactors and the high-level waste generated when the Department of Energy extracted material from spent fuel to create nuclear weapons. It does not include the locations of research reactor sites, special nuclear materials (e.g., plutonium-239 and uranium-235), transuranic wastes, or low-level nuclear wastes. Which is why locations like Northern New Mexico appear so pristine in the map, despite a continuing [nuclear legacy](#).

There also are some discrepancies between the map delivered to Congress and [this map](#) of spent-fuel storage sites maintained by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission:



The NRC's Current U.S. Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation (ISFSI) Map as of April 12, 2019. NRC

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I've covered the energy and environment beat since 1985, when I discovered my college was discarding radioactive waste in a dumpster. That story ran in the Arizona Repu... **Read More**