

Public Preferences about Consent-Based Siting of Facilities for Radioactive Waste Management in US

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Abstract

The President's Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future recommended an adaptive, staged, and consent-based approach to siting future facilities for radioactive waste in the US. A prerequisite prior to entering into a consent-based approach is to understand public awareness about current radioactive waste management practices and preferences and support for future management options and siting of the associated facilities. The Center for Energy, Security & Society has tracked the evolution of public dialogue on nuclear energy and the management of the resulting radioactive waste through national annual surveys and in social and news media since 2006. The 2016 survey included questions regarding how survey respondents understand and evaluate consent in the context of the storage and disposal of spent nuclear fuel. When asked who should have a veto in a siting decision, citizens living within 50 miles of the proposed facility, a state's department of environmental quality, majority voters in the state, and the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission were most likely to be named. Respondents were much less likely to prefer that environmental advocacy groups or elected legislators have a veto over the siting decision. With regard to withdrawing consent, the public believes that a host community should be able to withdraw its consent up to the license submission phase, after technical and social suitability analyses have been completed. Most respondents agreed that consent should not be withdrawn after construction has begun. Survey results also suggest that not all mechanisms of public engagement are equally attractive. Attending informational meetings, expressing their opinions on social media, and writing to their elected representatives are the most likely means of engagement. With reference to institutional trust, the survey results found that the National Academy of Science, university scientists, and local emergency responders are the most trusted entities to provide technical information about nuclear waste risks and benefits. National and local media, utility companies, and pro- and anti-nuclear groups were the least trusted to provide such information.

Acknowledgements

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