

Brief history of the West Valley Nuclear Waste Site

from Citizens Campaign for the Environment

The site was operated by a company called Nuclear Fuel Services (NFS), as a nuclear fuel reprocessing center from 1966 to 1972, and accepted radioactive waste for disposal until 1975. In 1976, after changes in safety and environmental regulations, NFS determined that it was too costly to comply with the regulations, and left the site to the government. During the operation of the plant, 640 metric tons of spent reactor fuel was processed, resulting in 660,000 gallons of highly radioactive liquid waste.

Dangerous contamination remains

While NFS only reprocessed nuclear fuel at the site for six years, it left a legacy of contamination that we have to contend with far into the future. At least 250 acres of the 3,345-acre site are heavily contaminated with dangerous nuclear and hazardous wastes, many of which will be radioactive for tens of thousands of years, and some for millions of years. There is no safe level of exposure to radioactive waste—every exposure increases the risk of serious adverse health impacts, including cancer, reproductive disorders, and neurological effects.

Leaving the waste buried at the site threatens public health, the environment, and our economy.

The site has been plagued with problems from the start, including leakage of radioactive waste in several areas. A significant underground plume of radioactive elements is spreading through groundwater. The waste site is on a plateau, which is highly susceptible to erosion. Scientists recognize that over time erosion will lead to release of buried toxic waste. The site is in the Great Lakes watershed, and leaks of waste threaten drinking water, public health, wildlife, and billion dollar industries such as fishing and tourism. The safest and most cost-effective option in the long run is to excavate and clean up the entire site as soon as possible!