

**Opening Statement of the Honorable John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
“Transporting Nuclear Materials: Design, Logistics, and Shipment”
October 1, 2015**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Annually, over three million packages containing radioactive material are transported throughout the United States. Privately shipped items are safely regulated and federally overseen by both the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The NRC must approve any package used for shipping nuclear material before shipment. To secure the necessary approval, the package must be shown to withstand a series of accident conditions which are sequentially performed to determine cumulative effects on the package. The rigorous testing and monitoring of these items highlights the lack of technical issues to transport nuclear material.

State authorities also play a key role in the transportation system by identifying highway routes and assuring emergency responders are adequately prepared. Regional organizations, such as the Council of State Governments Midwestern Office, extensively communicates with the public to prepare communities.

They also provide “lessons learned” from historical nuclear transportation activities to continually improve the radioactive material transportation planning process and public outreach. The successful track record is a testament to the established guidelines and system.

The Federal government also has significant experience shipping nuclear material. For example, the Department of Energy (DOE) ships spent nuclear fuel from naval ships to Idaho for storage and transports radioactive material across the country for nuclear research and development activities. DOE has managed thousands of safe shipments of low-level radioactive waste for disposal in New Mexico and even disposes of nuclear material at the Nevada National Security Site, located directly adjacent to the Yucca Mountain site.

However, much of the material that is currently shipped is less hazardous and in smaller quantities than high-level radioactive waste, spent nuclear fuel, and defense nuclear waste which must be permanently disposed of. Congress directed DOE to appropriately plan for a transportation campaign to move spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste for permanent disposal when the Nuclear Waste Policy Act was signed into law in 1982. Yet 33 years later, many nuclear experts recognize transportation may still be the “long pole in the tent.”

In 2006, the National Academies of Science published a comprehensive report, including findings and recommendations, to develop and execute a national transportation campaign for spent nuclear fuel disposal. In 2012, the Obama Administration’s Blue Ribbon Commission evaluated DOE’s implementation of these recommendations and noted much work remains to be accomplished. While DOE had made limited progress, much of the planning has been undone over the last six years and DOE now is treading water by conducting only generic, non-site specific planning.

The scale and necessary coordination for shipment will require a persistent effort from Federal, State, local, and tribal governments and private entities. DOE had planned to transport 3,000 tons of commercial spent nuclear fuel a year, while the fleet of nuclear power plants continues

to annually generate about 2,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel. A 2008 life cycle system analysis for the Yucca Mountain Project included a \$20 billion, 70-year National Transportation Campaign.

While Congress potentially considers amending the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, we must evaluate whether marginal safety gains from temporarily consolidating used fuel justifies the financial costs to transport used fuel twice.

As this Committee continues to engage in conversations with national stakeholders to identify a path forward for permanent disposal of spent nuclear fuel, I hope DOE revisits previous recommendations and lays the foundation for a national campaign.

One constructive step is the recognition to procure a fleet of railcars to ship spent fuel. In August, DOE signed a contract for the design of a railcar that could meet the Association of American Railroads requirements for transporting spent fuel and high-level waste. However, after the prototype railcar is acquired, it still must undergo rigorous testing to demonstrate performance. DOE estimates the overall timeframe for the development of the entire train system is seven to nine years. The lead time is a reminder Congress and DOE must remain attentive to comprehensive issues associated with used fuel management policy.

Today, we will hear from expert stakeholders about the experience we have in moving nuclear material, such as engaging with state and local stakeholders to share information, identify routes, and train emergency responders.

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