

**Citizens' Oversight Projects (COPs)**

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PRESS RELEASE -- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITIZENS' OVERSIGHT PROJECTS  
CitizensOversight.org

## **Citizens Oversight Calls Full-Stop and Thorough Safety Review at San Onofre after Near-Miss Incident**

### **Whistle-blower reported 104-ton nuclear waste container teetering over an 18 foot fall held by only 1/4 inch**

#### **Safety culture at San Onofre questioned by OSHA inspector**

SAN DIEGO (Aug 12, 2018) -- Citizens Oversight, Inc., the organization who sued the Coastal Commission and Southern California Edison to stop the nuclear waste dump on the beach, today announced a call for a full safety review of the nuclear spent fuel loading operations after safety inspector and whistle-blower David Fritch spoke at the Aug 9, 2018 Community Engagement Panel (CEP) meeting in Oceanside. Fritch described a near-miss accident scenario where a 104-ton spent nuclear fuel canister was held by only one-quarter inch from falling 18 feet.

Fritch, an OSHA inspector who has been working on the San Onofre site where spent fuel is being moved to the underground spent fuel storage installation only 100 ft from the water's edge, said that the workers thought they had lowered the canister into the underground vault, only to find out that it had become lodged on a guide ring, which was about 18 feet up from the bottom of the vault, held there by a fraction of an inch.

Fritch's full remarks and the initial response to them at the meeting can be viewed at this link: [https://youtu.be/cv7EGG\\_TWcs](https://youtu.be/cv7EGG_TWcs) His comments are transcribed in the description of the video.

Ray Lutz, engineer at Citizens Oversight said, "Edison says there was no risk because they have modeled that the canisters can be dropped 25 feet without failing. Models can be wrong, as they have never been validated by any actual drops. But intuition says that if the 104-ton, 5/8" thick stainless steel canister had fallen the 18 feet, it would have suffered substantial damage, the containment may have been breached, and it very likely would have become wedged in the bottom of the vault. With no circulating air cooling possible, the fuel would quickly overheat. If the fuel assemblies inside were also compromised, there is a risk that a critical reaction would have been sustained. It could have resulted in a melt-down scenario similar to what happened at Fukushima, perhaps melting through the concrete block and into the ground

water, contaminating the coastal area for many miles. It is unclear how they could get the crumpled mess back out of the underground vault at that point.

"These mistakes place the population of approximately 8.4 million residents around the facility at extreme risk of a major disaster. Of concern also was the fact that Edison did not disclose this near-miss at their own meeting and it seems such events have happened at least one other time, also not disclosed. Edison has no plan for what to do if a real disaster should unfold."

Fritch also listed a number of concerns regarding the dismal safety culture at the plant. He said they were under-trained, under-staffed, and did not communicate lessons learned to subsequent workers.

In a subsequent interview by KPBS, CEP chairman David Victor minimized the seriousness of the incident saying it was nothing more than a "workplace safety issue." Victor should step down from his position at the chairman of the Community Engagement Panel if he does not understand the seriousness of this incident.

Therefore, Citizens Oversight calls for the following:

1. **STOP:** A full-stop on any further movement of spent fuel to the underground facility until a full analysis, report, and corrective actions are defined and taken.
2. **REPORT:** SCE must report this incident to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and conduct an analysis to determine how these mistakes occurred. The NRC should also let us know why they were unaware of this incident, and why such incidents are not reported.
3. **DISCLOSE:** SCE should disclose all prior similar events, including the one referenced by Mr. Fritch, and any other "mistakes" made by their staff during the spent fuel loading operation.
4. **RESPOND:** SCE should provide a response to the claims that they are under-staffed, under-trained, and have a poor safety culture, including steps to be taken to become safety oriented.
5. **PLAN:** Since this is a known failure mode, SCE should explain the steps they would take to deal with the problem, assuming the worst, that the canister would have fallen, been stuck in the vault, breached the containment boundary, and proceeded into a melt-down scenario. It is unacceptable to hear yet again from Tom Palmisano of SCE that they would "evaluate the situation and decide what to do at the time." And if the spent fuel pools are demolished, as they propose, then how can the intensely radioactive spent fuel be repackaged? (After being out of the reactor for 10 years, a typical spent fuel assembly will kill a human standing one meter away with three minutes.)
6. **REDESIGN:** Holtec should change their design of the spent fuel system so it is impossible for a canister get stuck in the lowering process, and improve observability during that process so there can be no confusion as to the state of the canister at all times.

**FURTHERMORE,** The lack of care in spent fuel handling on site leaves us with the unfortunate conclusion that there is no way we can trust for-profit corporations to transport the spent fuel hundreds of miles to a remote site. Citizens Oversight calls on the leaders at Camp Pendleton to provide an alternative location perhaps about three miles inland on the Camp Pendleton military base, so that the spent fuel

canisters can be moved under I-5 on roads isolated from the public, never put communities at risk along any transportation route, and move it away from the current location only yards from the ocean ecosystem, in a tsunami inundation area, and near public beaches, a major freeway, and an active rail line. This still leaves the spent fuel in an earthquake zone, but it may be a compromise we will have to make to avoid handling mistakes.

More Information:

The Project: <http://copswiki.org/Common/StopNukeDump>

HELMS proposal: <http://copswiki.org/Common/HelmsProposal>

San Diego Union Tribune Article: <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/business/energy-green/sd-fisongs-whistleblower-20180810-story.html>

KPBS News: <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2018/aug/10/san-onofre-community-panel-discusses-transportatio/>

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