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## Costly Nukes

**Local governments could face a hefty bill should nuclear power-plant waste come to Utah.**

by [Ted McDonough](#)



Becoming home to nuclear-fuel waste can carry a huge price tag for state and city governments as local emergency crews take on the responsibility of guarding waste shipments and protecting residents.

Even in the best case, where trainloads of spent fuel are shipped without problem, the cost of monitoring the shipments and gearing up for a potential emergency could be in the billions.

That warning comes from Nevada where a consultant projects it will cost \$385 million to prepare for shipments to the proposed national nuclear-waste repository at Yucca Mountain. For Nevada's Clark County alone, the projected cost totals \$2.5 billion by the time the last shipment arrives 24 years later.

Steve Erickson of the Utah-based Citizens Education Project (CEP) points to the Nevada numbers as a harbinger of Utah's costs should Private Fuel Storage (PFS) succeed in locating a site for nuclear-power leftovers—billed as “temporary” until Yucca Mountain comes online—on the Skull Valley Goshute reservation.

PFS has pledged to pay Tooele County, where the waste ultimately would land, but other areas could incur emergency costs as well. Before casks of spent nuclear fuel reach the proposed storage site, they would travel by rail from points as diverse as Florida and California. Shipments would arrive in Utah on rail lines from the north, pass near Ogden and

through Salt Lake City near the Gateway development, then head west to Tooele County and the Skull Valley reservation, about 50 miles southwest of Salt Lake City.

As part of Nevada's fight against nuclear shipments, the consulting firm Urban Environmental Research (UER) examined the potential costs of training and equipping police and fire crews for some Nevada cities along the train route to Yucca Mountain.

Sheila Conway, company principal, said few local police and fire agencies are trained or equipped to deal with a possible nuclear accident. Getting cities ready means purchasing radiation detectors and training emergency crews. Then there's the cost of getting on the terrorist radar screen. "Nuclear waste shipments are moving targets," she said.

Dealing with a potential terrorist threat would mean building an advanced emergency operations center, adding communications equipment to monitor shipments and developing the intelligence capability of local law enforcement.

Utah hasn't performed similar studies, according to Dianne Nielson, head of Utah's Department of Environmental Quality and Denise Chancellor, the assistant state attorney general heading up Utah's opposition to PFS. The Salt Lake Chamber has considered a study, said Natalie Gochmour, vice president of the chamber, which came out against PFS complaining the stigma of the project could harm the business climate.

Erickson said Utah's costs aren't likely to be as high as those calculated for Nevada, given the larger scale of the Yucca Mountain project. But Utah is sure to face similar issues, he said.

"And at this point, no one seems to have any idea who would pay for it," he said. "Local taxpayers will have to eat the costs one way or another."

Bruce Whitehead, a PFS spokesman, called predictions of economic doom absurd. Spent fuel will be shipped in concrete and steel casks tested to withstand impacts at highway speeds.

PFS will provide security guards along the entire route, he said. And the company will pay local governments and lend its own employees to help with training.

There will be additional money for local governments that cooperate, Whitehead said. PFS won't have to pay taxes, being located on an Indian reservation, he said. But PFS already is giving Tooele County \$4,500 per month and has inked contracts with Tooele County and the Goshutes worth potentially hundreds of millions.

If Utah state officials would talk to PFS, the company is happy to offer the state a "rather healthy" payment as well, he said.

Whitehead said any costs not covered by PFS will be paid for by the federal government.

That's unlikely, said UER's Conway. The federal Department of Energy plans to give local governments training grants in advance of nuclear shipments, but Conway said the money won't cover equipment and the DOE is talking about \$200,000 per impacted state.



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