

Title: Air Force Anti-Nuke Dump, Too
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The Air Force says the proposal to ship high-level nuclear waste to Southern Nevada poses a national security threat to pilot training.

Air Force Secretary Sheila Widnall has told the House Resources Committee that any route across lands used for training would "severely affect national security by reducing Air Force and joint training."

The Nellis Range extends over Southern and central Nevada where live fire and instrumental threats test U.S. and allied pilots training in B-1s, B-2s, F-15s, F-16s, F-117s and F-22s. Top-secret testing also is undertaken, Widnall said.

Widnall did not disclose the classified programs referred to in her letter to the committee.

"In regard to classified programs, there would be significant impacts and in accordance with your request we have provided that information through the House National Security Committee," she said.

Instead of using the proposed Chalk Mountain heavy-haul route from Rachel, through the Nellis Range to Area 25 at the Nevada Test Site, Widnall asked that the bill be amended to keep six to 13 shipments per week for 30 years on existing roads and interstate highways.

Bob Loux, director of the Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office, said he has sought a position from the Air Force this month on a Senate bill that designates that very route.

"Any transportation is basically incompatible with the bombing range and those flights in training," Loux said. The state is concerned about access to top secret areas needed by state staff to evaluate safety and risks on the nuclear waste routes.

"The Air Force concerns are above and beyond the state's opposition to storing or dumping the waste in Nevada," Loux said.

Maj. Gen. Marvin Esmond, commander of Nellis Air Force Base, said anyone entering top secret areas requires clearances and a "need to know" for access.

Although Senate Majority leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., had promised Rep. John Ensign, R-Nev., not to bring the temporary storage bill to the floor this year, with Dole's resignation from the Senate, the future of temporary nuclear waste storage remains in limbo.

Air Force concerns about nuclear waste storage in Nevada are not new.

In 1983, the Air Force objected to a permanent high-level nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain, 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, because it could create a disaster if a fighter jet crashed into the site while radioactive canisters were being unloaded from trucks or rail cars.

At the time, the U.S. Department of Energy, in charge of studying Yucca Mountain and other possible sites in Washington state and Texas, considered such a jet crash the worst kind of accident.

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