

# Lacey vote leaves Oyster Creek nuke waste in limbo

**Amanda Oglesby** - Asbury Park Press -- August 25, 2020

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LACEY - Township officials are pushing a company that is dismantling the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant for more answers about how a half-century's worth of radioactive nuclear waste will be safely stored for decades to come.

The municipal Planning Board on Monday unanimously denied an application by Holtec International to perform construction on a site used for storing spent radioactive fuel. Holtec was before a board meeting at Gille Park, held outdoors because of the pandemic, seeking approval for construction that would enable the company to double the number of towering spent fuel storage casks near the plant.

Currently, 34 casks of fuel rods are located on a concrete pad at the plant. Holtec plans to add another 34 casks to the site, for a total of 68, in order to fully decommission the facility.

Each cask is about 20 feet high and about 11 feet in diameter, with multiple steel shells and 27 inches of concrete surrounding the spent fuel assemblies, said Joy Russell, Holtec's senior vice president and chief of strategy. The casks are designed to withstand tornadoes, explosions, floods, fires, extreme temperatures and plane crashes, she said. They are crafted to last more than 100 years, she said.



"The potential for a leak simply doesn't exist," Russell told the Planning Board on Monday before a crowd of about 50 people, some of whom attended the meeting to air concerns about the nuclear waste. "In the unlikely event a pinhole leak were to occur, it would be a very slow leak that we would detect."

Holtec will remain responsible for maintaining and inspecting the casks for as long as they sit in Lacey, she said.

The casks will remain in the township for the indefinite future, though Lacey officials are struggling to change that future.

"Fifty years ago this town agreed to a generation plant, not a spent fuel storage facility," Planning Board member and Ocean County Freeholder Gary Quinn said during the Monday board meeting.



At nuclear power plants across the nation, like at Oyster Creek, decades worth of spent fuel is building up in storage casks. Plans for a permanent, centralized repository have yet to materialize in the United States.

Holtec has applied to build a long-term underground storage facility in southeastern New Mexico. That application is still pending.

Meanwhile, the hundreds of steady, high-paying jobs Oyster Creek once supplied are gone. The spent

fuel remains the plant's unwanted and enduring legacy.

**More:** [What's going on at Oyster Creek? Lacey officials, residents, others want to know](#)

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"We're dealing with radioactive material that could take and destroy the entire southern part of the state, if not further out, if there's ever any kind of major catastrophe here," Quinn said. "I think there should be outside eyes looking at this stuff."

Holtec representatives have stated that company decommissioning work and spent fuel storage are being thoroughly monitored by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The federal agency even controls the company's use of the power plant's nearly \$1 billion decommissioning trust fund.



Holtec employees spent nearly four hours on Monday at Gille Park, where the Planning Board met due to limits on indoor crowd size set by Gov. Phil Murphy. During they time, they answered questions on cask and site safety and promised not to accept fuel from other nuclear plants.

Yet Planning Board members voiced concerns about the potential for emergencies, such as a faulty cask or break in the concrete pad supporting the structures. They questioned whether the pad could support double the cask

weight, and objected to assurances of the concrete's soundness performed by a Holtec subsidiary, Nuclear Consultants International.

Holtec employees countered that the casks are safe and are in use at plants around the world. The concrete pad has also undergone thorough testing by the company as well as its subsidiary, Holtec representatives said during the meeting.

"We want you to get to know us and know that we're here to do the right things," said Russell, the Holtec vice president.

Board members also cited worries about long-term upkeep and monitoring of the casks in perpetuity.

"Realistically, this (waste in Lacey) probably will outlast anybody sitting in this room tonight," said Quinn, adding that he was not convinced the company could overcome the bureaucratic hurdles of shipping the nuclear material across the country, even if such a repository were approved.



To decommission Oyster Creek, Holtec must empty the fuel rods from the plant's cooling pool and move the fuel rod assemblies into dry storage casks.

The Planning Board's rejection on Monday could delay Holtec's plans to decommission the plant within a decade.

Attorney Robert C. Shea, who represents the company, said the Planning Board was going

outside its jurisdiction in its questioning of matters that are regulated by other agencies, such as the NRC. It was not immediately clear if Holtec would appeal the decision.

Lacey residents Paul Dressler, Ron Martyn and his wife Charlotte, said they were pleased with the board's decision. Dressler, who with Martyn co-founded a coalition called the Concerned Citizens of Lacey, wants more transparency from Holtec.

"How do we know they have enough money to finish this (decommissioning)?" he said.

"I'm disappointed in the attitude of Holtec," said Martyn. "They think they're above answering any questions. They're not transparent."

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