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A picture of an underground nuclear waste storage facility in Sweden  
SKB / DEFRA

## [The US Is Running Low On Nuclear Residue Disposal Sites](#)

*The current burial site will soon reach its designated limit*

Disposing of nuclear wastes is a tricky business, and countries wanting to get rid of the used fuel of their reactors must find appropriate places to do this, and must also build suitable facilities, to prevent any contamination to surrounding areas. The best way to do this is in an underground deposit, where thick concrete walls and thousands of feet of rock separate the hazardous area from the outside world.

The United States currently has a single such disposal site, at Yucca Mountain in Nevada, close to the Cold War-era nuclear bomb testing grounds. The site is restricted to 77,000 tonnes of radioactive waste, but current estimates say that, in a couple of years, this limit will be reached and exceeded. The Energy Department is currently assessing its position. There aren't many options for nuclear disposal - either expand the site in Nevada, or build a new one somewhere else, Department officials say.

The institution is to send a proposal to the US Congress, which will ask for the elimination of the cap, and the expansion of the Yucca facility. "We've done enough testing around the site to know that we can make it bigger," said Civilian Nuclear Waste Program director, Edward Sproat, while addressing a conference on nuclear waste disposal techniques.

Harry Reid, Democrat, Senate Majority Leader, vowed to block this initiative. His position is in tune with that of President Barack Obama, who said that he didn't believe that the Nevada site was capable of keeping highly-radioactive waste buried 90 miles northwest of Los Angeles for the next million years or so.

Other options could include the construction of a temporary, near-surface disposal unit, while the Congress and the Energy Department settle their differences. The decision-making process on the matter could take up to four years, which means that the capacity of Yucca would be far exceeded by that time, as more than 104 nuclear power plants dump their wastes there.