

Simpson: European market promising

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WASHINGTON — European efforts to dispose of radioactive waste could produce buyers for Wyoming soda ash and bentonite, Sen. Al Simpson said Wednesday.

The Wyoming Republican was one of six senators who spent last week touring nuclear facilities in Sweden and France. The tour include uranium processing plants and nuclear waste repositories.

Simpson said he was surprised to find that the storage of nuclear wastes requires raw materials that could be supplied by Wyoming producers. Sweden stores low and medium-level wastes in tunnels bored into solid granite, he said.

After the wastes are in place, the tunnels are filled with bentonite, Simpson said.

"I didn't know they were pouring hundreds of tons of bentonite into holes in the ground," he said.

France encases high-level wastes in glass — glass that requires soda ash to produce, Simpson said. Neither the bentonite nor the soda ash presently comes from Wyoming, he said.

The Swedes and the French said Wyoming bentonite and soda ash producers would be welcome to bid for contracts to supply the nuclear waste storage facilities, Simpson said.

In addition to identifying possible new markets for Wyoming products, Simpson said the trip made it clear that the United States is lagging behind other countries in dealing with nuclear wastes.

"We have to get off our butt and decide what we're going to do with a permanent geological repository," he said.

The 123 commercial nuclear reactors that are now or soon will be in operation in the United States have no place to put their spent fuel or other high-level wastes, Simpson said.

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