

Nuclear Energy: State and Federal Regulation

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In the wake of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan, questions about the safety of nuclear energy are being raised. In this post, we provide information about nuclear energy as it is regulated in Texas and at the national level. For general background and information about nuclear energy in Texas, see the Texas Comptroller's Energy Report, Chapter 8 on [Nuclear Energy](#) (2008).

The U.S. has 104 operating nuclear reactors. Locations and additional details about individual reactors are available on this [map](#) (U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, October 2010). In Texas, there are two operating nuclear reactors: [Comanche Peak](#) in Glen Rose and the [South Texas Project](#) located near Bay City. Six new power reactors are being proposed in the state. [Locations](#) of these project power reactors include additional units at Comanche Peak and at the South Texas Project, as well as new units in Victoria County.

Commercial nuclear power reactors in the U.S. are regulated by the [U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission](#) (NRC). The Commission provides information about the [reactor oversight process](#), as well as [regulations, guidance, and communications](#) of operating reactors.

Texas is one of 37 "[agreement states](#)," allowing it to regulate radioactive material in-state, excluding federal facilities and nuclear power reactors. A [map](#) of all agreement states is provided by the NRC, and includes links to individual state regulations and official documents. Texas' regulatory scheme is also described on the website of the Texas Department of State Health Services, [Radiation Control Program](#) (updated March 2011). The site also provides a [history](#) of radiation control in Texas.

Radioactive waste can generally be classified as low-level or high-level waste. [Information](#) about these classifications, as well as storage and disposal of radioactive waste, is provided by the NRC. Under the [Texas Radiation Control Act](#) (Health & Safety Code, Ch. 401), processing, storage and disposal of most types of low-level radioactive waste in Texas is regulated by the [Texas Commission on Environmental Quality](#). The NRC provides information about [low-level waste disposal facilities](#) in the U.S. At present, there is not a permanent disposal facility for high-level waste, however one has been [proposed](#) at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.