

NUCLEAR POWER

German police clear protesters trying to stop nuclear waste train

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There were clashes between protesters and riot police

Police have removed hundreds of anti-nuclear protesters from rail tracks in northern Germany where activists are holding demonstrations to try to disrupt a train carrying nuclear waste from France.

Police have moved to clear hundreds of anti-nuclear activists staging a sit-in on rail tracks to halt a train carrying highly radioactive nuclear waste in northern Germany.

The nearly three-hour standoff took place in Harlingen, some 20 kilometers from the train's final destination of Dannenberg in northern Germany. Police said hundreds of activists staged a sit-in on rail tracks in an area of dense forest, while some activists earlier chained themselves to the tracks.

Earlier, police used water canons, pepper spray and batons to disperse protesters hurling rocks and fireworks.

At least 20 people were injured in the clashes. The protesters had reportedly attempted to remove stones from the railway line to destabilize the tracks.

Green party leader, Claudia Roth accused the police of acting too harshly: "I find the police deployment is completely exaggerated," she said at a party conference in Kiel. She added that the anti-nuclear demonstrations were a legitimate "expression of civil disobedience."

Protests all the way

The train, carrying 150 tons of reprocessed waste from a nuclear fuel reprocessing facility in Normandy, France, is being transported to Gorleben in the German state of Lower Saxony for storage in an underground salt mine.

The German government says the waste will only be stored temporarily in Gorleben. But protesters fear that the site may become permanent. The shipment is expected to reach its destination sometime over the weekend.

Earlier, the transport was delayed by anti-nuclear protesters for more than 24 hours on the French side of the border.

Several protests took place as the train made its progress through Germany.

The train crossed the border near Saarbrücken

Some 20,000 police officers have been deployed to secure the "Castor" (Cask for Storage and

Transport Of Radioactive material) transport carrying 11 containers of nuclear waste.

Last delivery

This shipment of German nuclear waste reprocessed in France is to be the last of its kind, due to the German government's decision to phase out its use of atomic energy following the disaster at Japan's Fukushima nuclear power station earlier this year.

Bottles and paint bombs were thrown at police in Lower Saxony ahead of the shipment

German Chancellor Angela Merkel decided to shut down eight of Germany's nuclear power plants in the wake of the Fukushima disaster, and later said all its remaining nuclear capacity would be taken off the grid by 2022.

Starting in 2012, no German nuclear waste will be sent to France for reprocessing, with the waste simply being stockpiled instead. Nuclear waste reprocessing extracts reusable elements like plutonium and uranium, but does not reduce the radioactivity of the waste.

Germany's anti-nuclear movement is considered one of Europe's strongest. Protesters oppose the transport on several grounds, saying it poses a threat to residents and the environment near the train's path in the event of an accident or an attack.

They also say such transports draw attention to what they see as atomic energy's biggest unsolved problem: the disposal of waste. The waste being transported to the site at Gorleben will remain potentially hazardous for thousands of years.

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P.S.

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