

Los Angeles Times

The investigation was applauded by at least one representative of the Marshall Islands, which continues to contend with the radioactive legacy of U.S. nuclear testing. The island nation sits in a remote part of the central Pacific, 5,000 miles southwest of Los Angeles.

“We are encouraged by the inclusion in the [act] of the requirement,” said Rhea Moss-Christian, chairwoman of the Marshall Islands’ [National Nuclear Commission](#), a three-person government panel that reports directly to the president on nuclear issues in the islands.

She said the original language for the bill, which was introduced by U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii), required a plan for relocating the waste, as well as an assessment of how local food is affected by the dome.

Moss-Christian said her committee was disappointed these elements were not included in the final version, which the president signed. But she added that she was hopeful the new law “will yield useful results to better inform our decision making.”

There was no immediate response from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which the Energy Department has assigned to monitor Runit Dome and the radiation leaking from it.

The waste site, known alternatively as the Tomb, or simply the Dome, holds more than 3.1 million cubic feet — or 35 Olympic-size swimming pools — of U.S.-produced radioactive soil and debris, including lethal amounts of plutonium.

Nowhere else has the United States saddled another country with so much of its nuclear waste, a product of its Cold War atomic testing program.

From 1946 to 1958, the United States detonated 67 nuclear bombs on, in and above the Marshall Islands — vaporizing whole islands, carving craters into its shallow lagoons and exiling hundreds of people from their homes.

Department of Energy contractors admitted last spring that the dome is vulnerable to rising sea levels and storm waves, and is leaking into Enewetak lagoon. Studies have shown elevated levels of radioactive contamination [in local seafood, including giant clams](#).

This year, the [Los Angeles Times published an investigation](#) of the dome and Enewetak lagoon, revealing that it was the location of at least a dozen biological weapons tests and also the repository for 130 tons of soil from an irradiated Nevada testing site.

The investigation also documented decades of U.S. deception in the Marshall Islands, including the withholding of critical information about people’s exposure to radiation. Thousands of documents about the testing program are still classified, leaving many Marshallese distrustful and unsure about the full impact of U.S. weapons testing there.

For decades, the Marshallese have expressed alarm about Runit Dome and its potential risk to the 650 inhabitants of Enewetak lagoon, who fish and harvest seafood from the lagoon, and collect coconut, pandanus, coconut crabs and breadfruit from islands in the atoll.

In July, a team led by Emlyn Hughes of [Columbia University’s K=1 Project](#) — a program designed to investigate nuclear weapons issues across the globe — found elevated levels of radiation on Runit Island.

[According to their research](#), levels were higher than those found emanating from soils near the sites of the Chernobyl meltdown and the Fukushima disaster.

“At last the U.S. government seems to be getting serious about addressing this serious environmental issue that it created decades ago,” said Michael Gerrard, a legal scholar at Columbia University’s law school. “This is a very welcome development.”

It also comes soon after the U.S. announced its intention to extend its Compact of Free

