

# Yucca Mountain News

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Program



## **C**omment Period Closes on Yucca Mountain Draft EIS

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After more than six months of public review, the comment period for the Yucca Mountain Draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) closed on February 28<sup>th</sup>. As part of the public review process, the Department of Energy (DOE) held more than 21 meetings in 11 states including Nevada. Ten public hearings were held in Nevada. DOE has received thousands of comments from individuals, government agencies, and other groups.

Churchill County submitted more than 200 comments on various aspects for the proposal covered by the DEIS. Primary concerns highlighted in the County's comments included:

- ◆ Whether DOE currently has the ability to accurately predict long-term performance of the repository and the environmental impacts associated with radiological contamination of area groundwater. DOE appears to have reached conclusions in the DEIS which currently are not well supported by performance assessment models for Yucca Mountain.
- ◆ Up to 95 percent of waste containment of the repository may now be achieved through the waste package container, yet very little information about its long-term performance capabilities had been developed for the DEIS.
- ◆ DOE provided no substantive details about proposed repository design and design alternatives. Instead, the DEIS attempted to use boundary analysis to substitute for missing information about unproven repository design attributes.
- ◆ The no-action alternative in the DEIS was not realistic in that it assumed no institutional control of radioactive waste stored at reactor sites after 100 years while institutional control is proposed for as much as 300 years at Yucca Mountain under the proposed action alternatives in the DEIS.
- ◆ DOE needed to include a worst-case scenario examining the conditions under which repository

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waste containment would not achieve regulatory standards. This analysis needed to describe the probability of occurrence, the likely consequences, and the inherent weaknesses of the performance assessment process used for the DEIS.

- ◆ The cumulative impact assessment in the DEIS did not consider the past impacts from the Nevada Test Site weapons testing program which affected downwind areas in Nevada.
- ◆ The Final Environmental Impact Statement should identify transportation's overall contribution to latent cancer fatalities particularly for communities along proposed routes in downwind areas.
- ◆ The DEIS did not adequately review transportation impacts along proposed highway and rail routes in Nevada. Instead, the DEIS relied upon unsubstantiated statements about generic transportation impacts.
- ◆ The DEIS did not consider the cumulative impact of underground weapons testing on regional groundwater resources. Additionally, the impact assessment does not consider the collective impact of all actions added together.
- ◆ The DEIS did not propose any real mitigation measures for

potential impacts. Most measures are related to site selection, design and defense in-depth concepts. We are also extremely concerned that DOE proposed no mitigation measures for waste transportation impacts, particularly in light of the latent cancer fatalities associated with this program.

DOE expects to release its final environmental impact statement (FEIS) in late 2000. The final environmental impact statement will address questions and comments submitted as part of the DEIS review. The FEIS will accompany a site recommendation report, which will be submitted to the President. If the President approves the secretary's recommendation, he will forward it to Congress. Congress must pass a resolution for locating a repository at Yucca Mountain before DOE can proceed with the repository licensing process. DOE expects to submit a license application to NRC by 2003.

## *L*ocal Governments Meet With NRC

Local government representatives from several Nevada counties met with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission members to provide comments on the recently completed draft environmental impact statement. The NRC is an independent government agency established by the U.S. Congress under the Energy

Reorganization Act of 1974 to ensure adequate protection of the public health and safety, the common defense and security, and the environment in the use of nuclear materials in the United States. The NRC's scope of responsibility includes:

- ◆ Commercial nuclear power reactors; non-power research, test, and training reactors.
- ◆ Fuel cycle facilities, medical, academic, and industrial uses of nuclear materials.
- ◆ The transport, storage, and disposal of nuclear materials and waste.



“We strive to provide an interesting, informative tour and hope you leave the mountain better enlightened about one of the most important issues facing our nation in the 21st century”.



The NRC will ultimately decide whether the Department of Energy will receive a license to construct and operate a high-level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain.

The meeting held in Rockville, Maryland was only the third time local governments from Nevada

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have briefed the full Commission. Representatives from Nye, Lincoln, Churchill, Clark and Lander Counties prepared a 70 page presentation focusing on regulatory, geo-technical, and transportation impacts not adequately analyzed in the DEIS.

## Churchill County High School to Visit NTS and Yucca Mountain

In May Churchill County High School will spend two days at Yucca Mountain and the Nevada Test Site. Churchill County High School teacher, Steve Johnson, has made this annual trek for the last six years. Approximately 30 high school science students travel by bus nearly six hours to Beatty. In the past, the high school students stayed overnight at Mercury, which served as the primary operational facility on the Nevada Test Site for the nuclear weapons testing program. The tour, which spends one day at the Yucca Mountain site, provides students an opportunity to see various scientific experiments, and facilities as part of site investigations underway at Yucca Mountain. They will also be allowed to visit underground experiments held in the exploratory studies facility at Yucca Mountain.

The tour of the Nevada Test Site focuses primarily on sites and facilities used by the United States to test nuclear weapons. From the early 1950s until 1992, more than 750 above and

below-ground nuclear weapons tests were made at NTS. As part of the tour, students will get to visit Frenchman Flats and see remnants of buildings and other structures which were used to test material strength and design against the force of a nuclear explosion.

## Low-Level Waste Shipments use Northern Route

A shipment of low-level radioactive waste passed through Northern Nevada enroute to the Nevada Test Site for disposal. The shipment from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory normally would travel south on Interstate 5 in California to Interstate 15 and approach NTS from the southwest. The shipment, which was the first of its kind in many years, was probably the result of efforts by DOE and the State of Nevada to avoid the Las Vegas Valley. Clark County and the City of Las Vegas pressured state and congressional leaders to persuade DOE to reroute low-level waste shipments onto secondary roads instead of using the U.S. Department of Transportation's preferred routes (interstate system). Their efforts have resulted in a proliferation of piecemealed route segments affect-

ing numerous Nevada communities. In all five new routes are in use. Ultimately, the State hopes their efforts will deflect future high-level waste shipments away from the interstate system (preferred route) in southern Nevada onto secondary roads through communities that are not prepared to respond to potential accidental situations involving Yucca Mountain shipments.



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This newsletter is a publication of the Churchill County Reposi-

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tory Planning and Oversight Program. Churchill County is one of ten affected units of local government involved in the Yucca mountain repository program. Funding provided to Churchill County is paid by users of electricity generated by nuclear power plants. Under a general contract with nuclear generating utilities, the federal government collects a fee of one mill (one-tenth of a cent) per kilowatt-hour from utility companies for nuclear generated electricity. The money goes into the Nuclear Waste fund which is used to fund all program related activities. For more information on Churchill County's program please visit our web site at [churchillcountynwop.com](http://churchillcountynwop.com)

or visit our offices at 85 north Taylor in the Chamber of Commerce building.

Additional information on the repository program can be obtained from the U.S. Department of Energy, Yucca mountain, Site Characterization Project Office at (775) 794-1444 or contact them at [www.ymp.gov](http://www.ymp.gov), or the Nevada Agency for Nuclear Projects, Nuclear Waste Project Office, Capital Complex, Carson City, Nevada 895710, (702) 687-3744 or visit them at their website at [www.state.nv.us/nucwaste](http://www.state.nv.us/nucwaste).



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