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NRC REVIEWS DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
VIABILITY ASSESSMENT FOR YUCCA MOUNTAIN, NEVADA, DISPOSAL SITE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed the Department of Energy (DOE) that it is making significant progress in a number of technical areas in its exploration of the Yucca Mountain, Nevada, site for a potential high-level radioactive waste repository.

But the agency underscored that further work remains for DOE to prepare a complete and high-quality license application if a decision is made to go forward with the Yucca Mountain project.

NRC also agrees with DOE's proposal to proceed with site characterization, calling for further exploration and technical evaluation to determine the acceptability of the Yucca Mountain site.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission discussed its views in a written summary report recently sent to DOE.

DOE performed the viability assessment to help decide on the feasibility of proceeding with work at Yucca Mountain that could potentially result in seeking a license for a repository there. NRC reviewed it as part of its pre-licensing consultation with DOE, as provided by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982. Both the NRC staff and the agency's Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste commented on the assessment in public briefings of the Commission in March.

Elements of the viability assessment which the NRC staff reviewed include the preliminary design of the repository, the performance of the repository system, and the license application plan, which discusses areas in which DOE believes further work is necessary and the department's priorities in technical areas.

NRC's review of the viability assessment indicates that more information needs to be provided in the following more significant areas.

- repository design;
- waste package corrosion;
- quantity and chemistry of water contacting waste packages and waste forms;
- saturated zone flow and transport (of radioactive materials);
- volcanic disruption of the waste package; and
- quality assurance (of all safety systems);

Staff members of both agencies are continuing pre-licensing consultations to resolve these and other more detailed issues, so that a high-quality license application can be completed by the DOE's target year of 2002, if the Secretary of Energy decides to recommend the Yucca Mountain site for the proposed repository.

The review of the viability assessment and the letter transmitting it to DOE can be found on NRC's website, at <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/reports/va.htm>

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