



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

September 15, 1993

The Honorable Ivan Selin
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with section 113(b)(3) of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, as amended, the Department has prepared the eighth in a series of progress reports focused on site characterization at the Yucca Mountain candidate site in Nevada. The document is entitled "Site Characterization Progress Report: Yucca Mountain, Nevada" and covers the period from October 1, 1992, through March 31, 1993.

The Civilian Radioactive Waste Management Program made significant progress during the reporting period at the Yucca Mountain Site Characterization Project. Several important advances were made in the surface-based testing, design, and Exploratory Studies Facility programs, including drilling utilizing the state-of-the-art LM-300 drill rig, exploratory trenching studies to assess quaternary faulting, issuance of the erosion topical report to address the issue of extreme erosion, and site preparation and initiation of north portal construction for the Exploratory Studies Facility.

Advanced conceptual design of the waste package commenced in October 1992. Detailed thermal, criticality, and shielding evaluations have been initiated on the seven concepts selected for advanced conceptual design. Advances have been made in the hydrologic modeling of Yucca Mountain. Planning has moved forward on the large block heater test and the engineered barrier system field tests. Scientific studies have continued on container and waste form testing as well as integrated testing.

The Yucca Mountain Site Characterization Project Office (Project Office) has started an Issue Resolution Process to help in the identification, clarification, and resolution of technical and regulatory issues raised during site characterization.

Formal interactions were conducted between the Project Office and the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board in October 1992 and January 1993. The Project Office held a workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in November 1992 to discuss the use of expert judgment as a decision tool and in the resolution of scientific issues. The Project Office participated in a workshop on alternative design concepts and construction activities sponsored by the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board's Panel on Structural Geology and Geoengineering.

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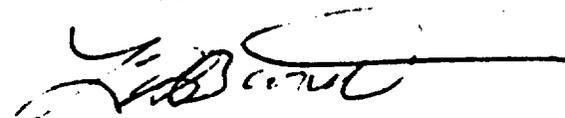
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On October 24, 1992, the President signed into law the Energy Policy Act of 1992 (Public Law 102-486). Site characterization at Yucca Mountain will continue during the National Academy of Sciences review and repromulgation of environmental standards for a repository system by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as mandated by that Act. The scope and direction of the site characterization program will be evaluated when new standards are promulgated.

Public outreach activities by the Project Office continue to expand public awareness regarding nuclear waste disposal concepts and the Yucca Mountain Site Characterization Program. During the period covered by this progress report, 76 tours of Yucca Mountain were held for about 3,700 members of the public and other interested parties. Numerous programmatic and technical workshops and presentations were conducted by U.S. Department of Energy staff. Meetings were held in various communities in southern Nevada to update the public and appropriate agency personnel regarding progress on site characterization.

The Department will continue to issue progress reports on a semi-annual basis, as specified in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

Sincerely,



Lake H. Barrett, Acting Director
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Enclosure

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