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DOE

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DOE ANNOUNCES QA AUDITS AND READINESS OF CIVILIAN WASTE PROGRAM

John Bartlett, the U. S. Energy Department's (DOE) Director of the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM), today announced new dates for Quality Assurance (QA) Qualification Audits at the OCRWM Washington Headquarters office and Yucca Mountain, Nevada, Project Office.

The audits are scheduled for Headquarters October 15-19, 1990, and for the Yucca Mountain Project Office in Las Vegas the following week.

There was previous concern that the postponement by Dr. Bartlett of these audits originally planned for June and July would cause delays in DOE's readiness to begin new studies at Yucca Mountain. However, because required environmental permits have not been released by the State, readiness has not been affected by the postponement. DOE has committed that new site investigation work will not begin at the Yucca Mountain investigation site until the program meets the necessary Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) QA Program requirements. Yucca Mountain, approximately 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, was designated

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by Congress in 1987 to undergo detailed scientific studies -- called site characterization -- to determine whether or not it is suitable for development of a deep, geologic disposal facility for spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste.

Under the QA Program, OCRWM is required by NRC to have a fully-qualified QA Program. This means that all DOE and DOE contractor personnel performing quality-affecting work must be certified as being professionally qualified to do their assigned jobs and that QA requirements and procedures are established and acceptable for the work to be done.

The scope of the Qualification Audits will include those management controls and associated procedures necessary for quality-affecting work. Qualification and training records of DOE and DOE contractors will be available to the auditors and effective implementation of the documented OCRWM QA Program must be demonstrated before the QA Program can be "qualified" and regarded by NRC as acceptable for controlling activities associated with site characterization.

DOE is in the process of establishing a new system of records which will be used for the specific purpose of documenting the qualifications and training of DOE and contractor employees. In compliance with the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. 552a), DOE announced its intent to establish such a system in the Federal Register in early August. Barring any comments from the public that require resolution prior to implementation, the system of records can be implemented in early October, 60 days after publication.

In addition to reviewing the qualifications of the personnel to perform the assigned tasks, the audit team will look at controls on all quality-affecting activities, work task descriptions, document control and records management. Auditors will focus on verifying implementation of controls on activities that are prerequisites to new site characterization work at Yucca Mountain, in particular, calcite and opaline silica vein deposit studies at Trench 14 and Midway Valley trenching studies in the Yucca Mountain area planned to begin in January 1991. The audits will be performed by OCRWM's Office of Quality Assurance and will include observers from NRC, the State of Nevada and affected units of local government in Nevada.

"I'm confident," Bartlett said, "that the results of these audits will confirm that the QA Program is in place and regarded by NRC as acceptable for conducting and controlling activities associated with new site characterization planned for January."

"Only by conducting new scientific studies," Bartlett added, "can we determine whether or not Yucca Mountain is suitable."

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