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Chief, Rules Review and Directives
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Mail Stop T-6-D-59
Washington, DC 20555-0001

To Whom it may Concern:

Subject: Draft NUREG-1768

I am writing in response to Draft NUREG-1768 request for public opinion on the standards for nuclear cask testing. The current standards are insufficient and do not show a true concern for the communities that will be potentially affected by nuclear waste dump sites. Because there are a significant many who object to the proposed nuclear waste dump site at Yucca Mountain and elsewhere, it would behoove the Nuclear Regulatory Commission at the very least to ensure that everything possible has been done to prevent the incredibly dangerous nuclear waste leakage that has been known to occur at other dump sites. Certainly with the recent financial setbacks that nuclear energy companies have been experiencing, it would not hurt to pump up the image of nuclear power in any way possible, and to prove that the nuclear energy industry is doing all it can to provide the safest, most environmentally sane service possible.

It is to Native American communities, in particular, for whom the NRC should improve cask standards, as it is they who have been most victimized in recent years by the threat of nuclear waste dump sites. The Navajo reservation houses one thousand abandoned uranium mines, for which very little has been done to cap or landscape the toxic wastes. Spokane and Yacama reservations have already been contaminated by nuclear waste and nuclear experiments. All over the U.S. and Canada, Native Americans have experienced the hazards of nuclear dump sites and of nuclear testing. The testing within Western Shoshone territory, for example, has caused significant amounts of radiation exposure, and has caused tens of thousands of cases of thyroid cancer. Many times, Native American communities affected by nuclear wastes are not even given the results of studies or tests, as when Shoshone children were given film test strips to wear on their arms, and were never told what the outcome was.

While some Native American communities, like the Ft. McDermitt Paiutes and the Skull Valley Goshutes, have tried to work alongside the nuclear industry, most Native Americans do not appreciate being dumped on and exposed to harmful substances that cannot even be seen. The Native American communities who have allowed their lands to be bought off have done so without the support of much of their community, and have done so out of economic need.

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Debate over nuclear waste dump sites often involves Native American communities. However, it is unfair to target these communities simply because they are not wealthy and do not, therefore, have much influence in policy-making. The message that the NRC and the big nuclear power companies send by targeting Native lands is that the land and its people are worthless, and are not as important as white, affluent communities. For Native Americans, though, their lives and their land are sacred. They have had to fight hard to keep waste dump sites away from their burial grounds and other sacred lands. Despite this, it appears that the huge amounts of money that the nuclear industry has used to buy influence has paid off, as the Western Shoshone territory of Yucca Mountain will likely indeed be used for a large nuclear waste dump site. The people living on this land will already have much to face, such as unacceptable rates of radiation exposure. The radiation standard for Yucca Mountain has been set at 100 millirems per year, which the NRC calculates as the equivalent of 1 in 286 lifetime risk of fatal cancer. This is much greater than the rate ordinarily set by Natives to regulate pollutants on the land, which is set to contribute no more than 1 in 10,000 to 1 in 1,000,000 lifetime risk of fatal cancer.

For the safety of communities through which nuclear waste may have to be transported en route to Yucca Mountain, and for the safety of the Western Shoshone who live there and who must likely live with a dump site, it is imperative that the NRC review and improve upon their cask testing procedures and, accordingly, update the casks to the most reliable design. The following improvements on the testing are necessary if the NRC is to look out for the well-being of *all* Americans and to act responsibly to solve the problems of nuclear power:

- Tests should include full-scale tests, rather than relying on models or computer modeling.
- Every cask designed for shipments to Yucca Mountain should be subjected to extra regulatory, full-scale testing, rather than subjecting only two cask designs to this level of testing, as is currently done.
- Testing should include puncture, crushing force, and deep immersion tests, in addition to the fire and crash tests currently performed.
- Casks should be tested for vulnerability in the case of an explosive or missile attack.
- All tests should be made public and results made available to the media.
- All possible shipping scenarios should be tested.
- The number of shipments should be limited as much as possible.

It is my hope that you will do everything possible to prevent even more suffering for Native American communities as a result of nuclear waste. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Alana La Beaf