

Dr. Stephan Brocoun, Acting Assistant Manager
Office of Licensing and Regulatory Compliance
U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management
Yucca Mountain Site Characterization Office
P.O. Box 30307
Las Vegas, NV 89036-0307

February 24, 1999

SUBJECT: NRC QUALITY ASSURANCE TASK FORCE

Dear Dr. Brocoun:

On December 9, 1998, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) met to discuss items of mutual interest regarding Quality Assurance (QA) and those areas contributing to resolution of Key Technical Issues of DOE's site characterization program at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. NRC staff have been closely reviewing the quality of the site investigations and engineering design work being performed by DOE and its contractors at Yucca Mountain. NRC staff have also been tracking a number of quality assurance open items related to documentation of work, control of purchased material and services, and timeliness of corrective actions that have not been adequately addressed.

DOE recognizes that it has a collection of research and scientific organizations involved in its program that are not experienced in doing nuclear safety related work, and that it must turn the culture of its organization around to be successful in licensing. DOE described some steps they have taken to implement a change to a nuclear safety culture. DOE also described an effort underway to perform a root cause analysis of recurring QA problems.

In order to increase NRC attention to these problems, NRC has established a QA Task Force to conduct an independent, objective, and focused review of the implementation of DOE's HLW QA program. As described in the enclosed QA Task Force Plan, participants will include QA specialists who will verify existing QA issues, evaluate the DOE Corrective Action Plan, and make recommendations for improvement of the Corrective Action Plan and its implementation.

If you have questions regarding the QA Task Force, please do not hesitate to contact my office at (301) 415-7252 or Ted Carter, of my staff, at (301) 415-6684.

Sincerely,

[Original signed by:]

Michael J. Bell, Acting Branch Chief

Performance Assessment & High Level Waste
Integration Branch

Division of Waste Management
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards

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Sincerely,

Michael J. Bell, Acting Branch Chief
Performance Assessment & High Level Waste
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Enclosure: As stated

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Letter to S. Brocoum from M. Bell dated: February 24, 1999

cc: R. Loux, State of Nevada
S. Frishman, State of Nevada
L. Barrett, DOE/Wash, DC
A. Brownstein, DOE/Wash, DC
S. Hanauer, DOE/Wash, DC
C. Einberg, DOE/Wash, DC
S. Rousso, DOE/Wash, DC
N. Slater, DOE/Wash, DC
R. Dyer, YMPO
R. Clark, YMPO
A. Gil, YMPO
B. Price, Nevada Legislative Committee
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R. Arnold, Pahrump County, NV
J. Lyznicky, AMA
R. Clark, EPA
F. Marcinowski, EPA
R. Anderson, NEI
R. McCullum, NEI
S. Kraft, NEI
J. Kessler, EPRI

HLW QA TASK FORCE

Purpose:

To conduct an independent, objective, and focused review of the implementation of DOE's HLW QA program and DOE's proposed plan to correct the existing deficiencies in implementing the existing HLW QA program. To accomplish this task, the task force will need to verify existing QA issues; evaluate DOE's Corrective Action Plan to correct the existing QA issues; make recommendations for improvement of the DOE Corrective Action Plan and its implementation, determine if DOE's plans to resolve QA issues can be accomplished by Site Recommendation, and make recommendations to NRC management on future monitoring of the QA issues.

Timing:

The QA Task Force will be focused on the review and evaluation of the DOE Corrective Action Plan expected in February 1999. It is expected that the QA Task Force will be able to complete its work by April 30, 1999.

QA Task Force Members:

Lead: Ken Hooks, URB

Members: William Belke, On-Site Representative, DWM
Ted Carter, DWM
Jack Spraul, FCSS
Tom Matula, SFPO
Bruce Mabrito, CNWRA (CNWRA participation in the Task Force will be through contractual arrangements.)

Task Force Activities:

The following initial activities will be conducted by the Task Force:

- > Initial task force kick-off meeting to review purpose and refine suggested task force activities. (Completed 12/14/98)
- > Task Force will be provided with relevant documents for review in order to update members on the current DOE HLW QA program and the QA issues. (Completed 12/30/98)
- > If necessary, W. Belke can provide members with a detailed briefing on the QA issues tracked to date or answer the Task Force's questions regarding QA issues in general. (Team Lead meeting with Belke 1/26/99; will determine need to brief entire Task Force)

Enclosure

- Task Force will talk to HLW staff to determine their perspective on the QA issues and, in particular, to participants of DOE observation audits to gain their perspective on the QA issues. (2/15/99)
- Director of the Division of Waste Management and Task Force Lead will meet with DOE management and QA staff to discuss the status of the QA issues. (01/26/99)
- Task Force will set up and hold telcons with DOE QA staff to determine status of DOE progress on resolution of existing QA issues on an as needed basis. (Task Lead will arrange 1/26/99)
- Task Force will meet with DOE in Las Vegas to discuss the current DOE HLW QA program and its implementation and discuss Task Force activities. (Team Lead meeting with DOE 1/26/99; will determine need for entire Task Force to meet in Las Vegas)
- The Task Force will meet with State of Nevada, as well as, Nye and Clark Counties to determine their perspective on DOE's QA program and its problems and discuss Task Force activities. (Team Lead meeting with DOE 1/26/99; will determine need for entire Task Force to meet in Las Vegas)
- Task Force will review and formally comment on the Root Cause Analysis/Corrective Action Report conducted by DOE and due to NRC in February. (4/1/99; estimated date, actual date depends on receipt of DOE report)
- After evaluation of the Root Cause Analysis/Corrective Task Force will re-evaluate its approach and further Task Force actions.
- The Task Force will provide the Director of NMSS a final report documenting status of this activity and making recommendations for future monitoring of the DOE HLW QA program implementation. (4/30/99; estimated date, actual date depends on receipt of DOE report)