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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY (DOE) COMMENTS ON U.S. NUCLEAR
 REGULATORY COMMISSION (NRC) ISSUE RESOLUTION STATUS REPORTS (IRSR)**

Reference: Ltrs, Stablein to Brocoum, dtd 10/29/97, 11/7/97, 11/7/97, 11/12/97, 11/13/97

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has completed its review of the Issue Resolution Status Reports (IRSRs) transmitted under the letters referenced above. We agree with the NRC that these reports facilitate staff-level resolution of issues that are important to licensing, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide you with our comments on these important documents. We believe that the issue resolution process will yield benefits for the development of a mutual understanding of important issues during prelicensing. The reports provide concise, detailed criteria and discussions that will assist in continuing to pursue a common understanding of such issues. In addition, our review of these reports will ensure that we provide the most recent information to NRC authors as they develop the reports and subsequent revisions.

Although we believe the issue resolution process has very real benefits for the development of mutual understanding of important concerns during prelicensing, we have comments and questions resulting from our reviews of the IRSRs; these are provided in Enclosures 1-5. Detailed comments on each report are also enclosed (enclosures 1-5). We believe DOE and NRC continue to make significant progress in achieving informal issue resolution in the areas covered by the IRSRs. We do not expect formal responses to our comments, and we will continue to schedule interactions as necessary to facilitate the resolution of these and other issues. Again, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the IRSRs and believe they are valuable tools for issue clarification and resolution.

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I look forward to continuing our dialog on this subject. If you or your staff have questions regarding our comments, please contact me at (702) 794-1359 or April V. Gil of my staff at (702) 794-5578.

AML:AVG-1264

Stephan Brocoun
Assistant Manager for Licensing

Enclosures:

1. Key Technical Issue: Repository Design and Thermal-Mechanical Effects Issue Resolution Status Report, 10/29/97
2. Key Technical Issue: Evolution of the Near-Field Environment, Issue Resolution Status Report, 11/7/97
3. Key Technical Issue: Unsaturated and Saturated Flow Under Isothermal Conditions Issue Resolution Status Report, 11/7/97
4. Key Technical Issue: Structural Deformation and Seismicity Issue Resolution Status Report, 11/12/97
5. Key Technical Issue: Thermal Effects on Flow Issue Resolution Status Report, 11/13/97

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