



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

April 14, 1997

Dr. Stephan J. Brocoum, Assistant Manager
for Suitability and Licensing
U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Civilian Radioactive
Waste Management
Yucca Mountain Site Characterization Office
P. O. Box 30307
North Las Vegas, NV 89036-0307

SUBJECT: TRENCHES AND TEST PITS SCHEDULED TO BE BACKFILLED

Reference: Letter from Brocoum to Bell dated March 24, 1997, Regarding
Trenches and Test Pits to Be Backfilled

Dear Dr. Brocoum:

Thank you for the notification of impending closure of 30 trenches and pits in and around the Nevada Test Site that were investigated for various purposes associated with the Yucca Mountain Project over the last 15 years. We have considered the benefits and costs of U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff visiting or revisiting some of the trenches/pits prior to their closure and have no compelling reason to do so at this time. Therefore, NRC has no objection to U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) proposed backfilling schedule.

NRC and Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses staffs have visited many of the trenches located on active and suspected active faults, such as on the Bare Mountain and Solitario Canyon faults and others in Crater Flat that are scheduled for backfilling. From general field observations made on site visits usually guided by DOE staff and its contractors in the past several years, we found the process of trench location, mapping, and reporting to be adequate for its intended purposes. Some of the trenches have been the focus of controversial data regarding such issues as slip rate and recurrence of faults, seismic potential, and contemporaneity of faulting and volcanism (the latter in regard to trenches found to contain basaltic ash in faults). It is our understanding from discussions with your staff that, if necessary to help resolve significant outstanding issues, certain trenches may be re-opened under controlled conditions, or new trenches prepared. DOE's concern for public safety and environmental protection and restoration attendant upon the continued presence of open trenches and pits is the paramount consideration for a decision to backfill.

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We continue to appreciate the opportunity to review trenches and test pits in the field and to receive notification of schedules to backfill such excavations.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By

Michael J. Bell, Chief
Engineering and Geosciences Branch
Division of Waste Management
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards

Enclosure: As stated

- cc: R. Loux, State of Nevada
- B.. Price, Nevada Legislative Committee
- J. Meder, Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau
- W. Barnes, YMPO
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