

MAR 5 1993

Mr. Dwight E. Shelor, Associate Director for
Systems and Compliance
Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management
U.S. Department of Energy, RW 30
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Shelor:

SUBJECT: PHASE I REVIEW OF U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY (DOE) STUDY PLAN
"CHARACTERIZATION OF THE YUCCA MOUNTAIN UNSATURATED ZONE IN THE
EXPLORATORY STUDIES FACILITY"

On January 21, 1993, DOE transmitted Revision 1 of the study plan, "Characterization of the Yucca Mountain Unsaturated Zone in the Exploratory Studies Facility" (Study Plan 8.3.1.2.2.4) to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission for review and comment. NRC has completed its review of this document using the Review Plan for NRC Staff Review of DOE Study Plans, Revision 2 (Draft of February 1, 1993).

The material submitted in the study plan was considered to be consistent, to the extent possible at this time, with the revised NRC-DOE agreement on content of study plans (letter from Holonich to Shelor, February 22, 1993). It should be noted that this revision of the study plan contains descriptions of only half of the planned activities to be conducted as part of this study. The staff did not consider that the absence of those activities compromised its ability to conduct its review of the information provided. However, consistent with the NRC-DOE agreement on content of study plans, the NRC staff requests that descriptions of the missing activities be provided for its review 90 days prior to initiation of work on those activities.

A major purpose of the NRC staff's review is to identify concerns with studies, tests, or analyses that, if started, could cause significant and irreparable adverse effects on the site, the site characterization program, or the eventual usability of the data for licensing. Such concerns would constitute objections, as that term has been used in earlier NRC staff reviews of DOE's documents related to site characterization (Consultation Draft Site Characterization Plan and the Site Characterization Plan for the Yucca Mountain site). It does not appear that the conduct of the activities described in this revision of the study plan will have adverse impacts on repository performance and the review of this study plan identified no objections with any of the activities described.

The NRC staff has no detailed technical comments related to this study plan at this time. Because the study plan describes only half of the planned activities and because the development of some of these activities are heavily dependent on ongoing prototype testing, the staff will reevaluate this decision after it receives and reviews the complete study plan.

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Mr. Dwight E. Shelor

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If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact Charlotte Abrams (301) 504-3403 of my staff.

Sincerely,

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Joseph J. Holonich, Director
Repository Licensing and Quality
Assurance Project Directorate
Division of High-Level Waste Management
Office of Nuclear Material Safety and
Safeguards

cc: R. Loux, State of Nevada
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