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JAN 23 1986

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U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

APPENDIX 7 INTERACTION TRIP REPORTS

We have received your letter of December 11, 1985 transmitting reports for "Appendix 7" interactions conducted in September, 1985. Topics covered during the interactions included trenching and core handling, examination of the draft Exploratory Shaft Test Plan (ESTP), meteorological monitoring, and geochemistry.

The trip reports, generated as a result of the Appendix 7 interactions, constitute a valuable source of information regarding NRC concerns and current perspectives relative to Nevada Nuclear Waste Storage Investigations (NNWSI) Project activities. Please be assured that the information contained in the reports, as well as the specific concerns raised by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), will receive serious attention by my office and the NNWSI Project technical staff.

These reports, as well as the interactions with members of your staff and your contractors' staffs, are very useful to us in determining the NRC's interests and concerns about our technical program. The report on trenching and core handling was particularly helpful in this regard.

We found, however, that the reports on geochemistry reached conclusions which were not based on information exchanged at the Appendix 7 interaction. These conclusions, which were apparently developed prior to the meeting are inappropriate for an Appendix 7 interaction. Please understand that our concern is not with the specific comments. Our position is that workshops are the proper forum for the development of conclusions such as these reports contain. A workshop is structured to provide a balanced exchange of technical opinions and to appropriately record the views of all participants.

We do have some suggestions, which you may find useful in the development of the procedure for organizing and conducting Appendix 7 activities, preparation of which you indicated is underway.

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In view of the nature of these interactions as prompt information exchanges, consultations and mechanisms to preliminarily identify concerns about the investigations relating to licensing issues, these interactions and the trip reports thereon should not develop broad conclusions based on the information exchanged. It must be recognized that these interactions focus on narrow and specific technical areas and that to develop broad conclusions regarding the technical viability of the site or its licensibility based on narrow perspectives is inappropriate.

In addition, both DOE and NRC should assure that participants in these interactions understand that their purpose is to freely exchange information available from their respective programs and to discuss on a preliminary and informal basis concerns which either party has about the technical validity and direction of the specific program area under discussion.

With regard to the above, we suggest that reports of the Appendix 7 interactions should be very careful as to conclusionary statements regarding the DOE program since, in the format of these meetings and resulting reports, there is no way to balance NRC or NRC contractors' conclusions with DOE perspective. Conclusions which are contained in or result from NRC contractors' work performed prior to the interaction with DOE may be particularly counter productive because of the sense of authority and credibility given to NRC staff and their contractors. Balance in presenting facts is critically important.

Once again, we appreciate the opportunity to review the information you have provided. The concern noted above relates not to the usefulness of Appendix 7 interactions, both to the NRC and the NNWSI Project, but to maintaining the original intent of that type of interaction.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss this matter in more detail.



Donald L. Vieth, Director
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