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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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TO: John J. Linehan, Section Leader, HLOB, Mail Stop 4-H-3
FROM: Paul T. Prestholt, Sr. On-Site Licensing Representative
DATE: April 19, 1988
SUBJECT: Newspaper Article(s)

Please find enclosed more information that appeared in
our local newspaper that is of interest.

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Scientists say Nevadans were served well by dump site workshop

By Laura Wingard
Review-Journal

The coffee was flowing and 100 scientists were gabbing. But this was not idle chatter over java. Instead, it was a serious gathering of scientists from the state and federal governments as well as the private sector. They met for some 30 hours over four days to scrutinize and question assumptions made by the U.S. Department of Energy in a 7,000-page, 28-pound document that will be used to determine whether Yucca Mountain is a safe place to build

the nation's first high-level radioactive waste dump. The scientists, specializing in geology and hydrology, showed up faithfully every day at 9 a.m. in the Aladdin Hotel's Imperial Room 4. They wanted coffee and they got it. Each day, hotel workers replenished the five-gallon coffee container within the first hour. The container was refilled several times a day. Four mauve-colored walls surrounded the scientists as they sat in rows at tables covered with white tablecloths.

Three projector screens lined the front of the room where officials with the Energy Department, Nevada's Nuclear Projects Agency and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission were positioned. Speaker after speaker made detailed presentations, filled with equations and complicated graphs about what lies beneath Yucca Mountain, 110 miles northwest of Las Vegas. After each dissertation, the scientists quizzed one another and probed for more information. One participant muttered during a brief break: "This is cruel what

they're putting us through." But when it was finally over, most agreed that Nevadans were served well by the workshop. "If I were a citizen of Nevada, I would be very happy," said John Trapp, an official with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Washington, D.C. "DOE has been very open at this meeting. The program is so damn complicated and the DOE is trying to do what it can." The four-day workshop cost the Energy Department \$13,500 in nuclear waste funds generated from a tax paid by consumers of nuclear-

generated electricity. It was staged at the urging of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which had challenged the adequacy of the Energy Department's seven-year, \$2 billion plan to study the proposed Yucca Mountain dump site. The commission, charged with licensing the underground repository that will be designed to hold 70,000 metric tons of nuclear waste, wants the Energy Department to do more to include theories that suggest Yucca Mountain isn't the place to build a dump.

Although the department made strides at the workshop, Trapp said, "DOE's work is just starting. We've given them a homework assignment and they'll get the grade when they turn it in." Energy Department officials said they plan to take what they learned at the meeting and revise their study plan by this summer. The state's nuclear waste experts who have joined with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in criticizing the department's study plan also had kind words in reviewing Please see WORKSHOP/5B

Workshop

From 1B
the workshop.

Nevadans can take some comfort in knowing that the meeting was "a show of good faith by the DOE that it's responding to the NRC's concerns," said Martin Mifflin, a geologist working for the state.

Mifflin's comments were nearly echoed by Terry Naumann, a geologist at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which has a grant from the state to study volcanism at Yucca Mountain.

"Everybody's having an opportunity to be heard and that's a step forward," Naumann said. "You can see there isn't too much agreement

among scientists. No agency is saying we have enough data.

In the Soviet Union, he said, there would not be the same type of public scrutiny. "I'm not saying the Soviets would load the stuff in shoeboxes and stick them in a closet," Naumann said. "But there wouldn't be the checks and balances we have."

Although the workshop was open to the public, average citizens did not overrun the meeting.

Several of the scientists agreed that the workshop was filled with so much technical information that even they had trouble digesting it all.

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