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January 15, 1997

Mr. Ronald A. Milner, Director  
of Program Management and Integration  
Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20585

SUBJECT: NRC HIGH-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE PROGRAM ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT,  
FISCAL YEAR 1996, NUREG/CR-6513, No. 1

Dear Mr. Milner:

Enclosed is a pre-publication copy of the "NRC High-Level Radioactive Waste Program Annual Progress Report Fiscal Year 1996" NUREG-6513, No. 1. The enclosure documents the status of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission review of ten key technical issues associated with a potential high-level waste (HLW) repository at Yucca Mountain. The document is important for what it is and what it is not. First, it does not make a "NRC finding" on the acceptability or unacceptability of any aspect of the Yucca Mountain site from a licensing perspective, but rather is intended to provide timely feedback to DOE on NRC staff's current views. The report is limited to the ten key technical issues the NRC staff currently believes are the most important to address during this prelicensing consultation period and does not address all potential, technical or administrative issues associated with the actual licensing procedure. The report provides NRC staff's current thinking on approaches to resolve these issues. The report documents the status of the current NRC efforts, current NRC staff opinions about specific technical aspects of the site, and projected future activities to obtain issue resolution in a timely fashion to support the national HLW program. The report should serve to facilitate a dialog between the NRC and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) staffs on the next appropriate course of action for each of these issues. The report provides some useful information for DOE to consider in its Viability Assessment and provides information to be considered for the license application.

After the DOE staff has read the report, we would like to discuss an approach for achieving effective and efficient dialogue on these issues at the next DOE/NRC management meeting. Possible approaches include: (1) a series of meetings, technical exchanges, or appendix 7 visits to discuss specific chapters; (2) a series of videoconferences; or (3) a workshop to cover the entire document over a three to four day period. Whatever the form of the interactions, we desire that the interactions advance the national HLW disposal program by either reaching resolution of the issues presented, defining a course or path to resolution of the issues, or clearly and very specifically documenting areas of technical disagreement. Where DOE staff does not agree with the technical discussions in the enclosure, the NRC staff and management are willing to discuss technical alternatives to addressing our concerns.

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