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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MAY 28, 1986

RADWASTE

DOE ANNOUNCES DECISIONS ON HIGH-LEVEL WASTE REPOSITORY PROGRAM

The U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced today that sites in Nevada, Texas and Washington have been selected for site characterization as candidates for the Nation's first geologic repository for permanent disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste.

DOE also announced that it has postponed indefinitely site-specific work for a second repository because of the progress in siting the first repository and the uncertainty of when a second repository might be needed. Areas previously identified for a possible second repository are no longer under active consideration. As required by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 (NWPAA), Secretary of Energy John S. Herrington nominated five sites and recommended three of them to the President for site characterization. The President has approved the recommendation. This decision was based on the development and public review of extensive geologic and environmental data gained from site studies which began before enactment of the NWPAA. (Sites nominated and recommended are the same sites identified by DOE in draft Environmental Assessments issued for public review and comment in December 1984.)

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The three candidate sites to undergo these studies, evaluations and comparisons are: Yucca Mountain in Nevada, Deaf Smith in Texas and Hanford in Washington. The Hanford site is near the lands of three Indian Tribes -- the Yakima Indian Nation, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe. Two sites nominated, but not recommended for site characterization, are Richton Dome in Mississippi and Davis Canyon in Utah.

DOE's decision to reassess the timing of its activities toward identification of areas for study as potential candidates for a second repository resulted from a number of factors. They include:

- o The continuing progress in siting the first repository;
- o The expectation of receiving Congressional authorization to proceed with the development of a Monitored Retrievable Storage facility;
- o Projections of spent fuel generation are uncertain and have been declining;
- o While there exists in the law the limitation for emplacing more than 70,000 metric tons of spent fuel in the first repository before a second repository is in operation, emplacement of that amount is very far into the future and Congress need not reconsider specifically a second repository until at least the mid-1990's or much later;
- o A decision that spending hundreds of millions of dollars now on siting would be premature and unsound fiscal management.

Earlier this year, DOE identified, from among 17 States, crystalline rock bodies in Georgia, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Virginia and Wisconsin as potential candidates for a second repository. With the announced postponement, the 17 States are no longer under active consideration.

Under the NHPA, DOE is authorized to construct the first repository and conduct siting activities for a second. The NHPA does not authorize construction of a second repository. DOE intends to continue studies for a second repository as required by the NHPA, but those studies will focus only on technical issues.

DOE will concentrate its efforts on continued successful progress on the development of the disposal system including the first geologic repository, the associated transportation system and implementation of an MRS program. DOE believes a centralized MRS to receive, consolidate and package spent fuel for bulk transport to the repository will enhance the overall disposal system. Under contracts with utilities, DOE is obligated to begin receipt of spent fuel for disposal by 1998.

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"Today's announcement is further confirmation of the priority the Administration has placed on ensuring that wastes produced from nuclear-generated electricity and U. S. defense activities are stored and disposed of in a safe and environmentally acceptable manner," said Ben C. Rusche, Director of DOE's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management.

Nuclear power now provides more than 15 percent of the Nation's electricity and commercial and defense high-level waste now exists in about 30 states.

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DOE NEWS:

STATEMENT BY JOHN S. HERRINGTON
SECRETARY OF ENERGY

NUCLEAR WASTE REPOSITORY
May 28, 1986

The Administration today has selected three candidate sites for the first geological repository for spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste.

The Department of Energy will now undertake detailed study and characterization of the three sites in Yucca Mountain, Nevada, Deaf Smith, Texas, and Hanford, Washington.

This action carries out the requirements of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, which lays out specific and detailed steps leading to the construction of a nuclear waste repository.

Today's decisions are the culmination of extensive evaluations of these and other potential sites during the past three years. The Department's work included the compilation of thorough environmental assessments and widespread public comment--more than 20,000 comments were received by the Department and incorporated into our decision.

We have reached an important milestone and taken a significant step forward.

It is a clear sign that this Nation will have the capacity for safely storing and disposing of high-level nuclear waste well into the twenty-first century.

Based on the progress we have made toward selecting a first repository site, I have reassessed the timing of the Department's activities toward identification of candidates for a second repository, and I have decided to postpone indefinitely plans for any site-specific work related to a second repository.

In January, the Department issued a draft Area Recommendation Report which proposed preliminary field work in the north central and eastern parts of the country. Other than cataloging the comments received by the Department, no further work is planned on this report. As a result of this postponement, the areas identified in the report are no longer under active consideration. No other sites are under consideration.

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Several factors convince me that this is a prudent decision:

- studies for the siting of the first repository are proceeding satisfactorily
- we are hopeful that Congress will authorize development of a Monitored Retrievable Storage facility, which will be a vital part of the overall disposal system
- while projections are uncertain about the amount of spent fuel to be generated, it is apparent that the volume is growing more slowly than anticipated just even a few years ago.
- in light of these projections, the first repository, which the law permits to hold up to 70,000 metric tons of waste, will be adequate in the foreseeable future.

Based on our review of this information it is the Department's opinion that the Nation need not consider a second repository until at least the mid-1990's -- or much later. It is clear that to go ahead and spend hundreds of millions of dollars on site identification now would be both premature and unsound fiscal management.

The Department intends to continue studies of a second repository program as required by the NWPA. These studies will, however, be technical in nature and not site specific.

We have taken several important steps today. We believe these actions are in the best interest of the American people and represent the most effective course for implementing the NWPA.