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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 10, 1985

DOE ISSUES MISSION PLAN FOR CIVILIAN RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) today issued its "Mission Plan for the Civilian Radioactive Waste Management Program." The plan presents current program plans for implementing its mandate for permanent disposal of the waste.

"The mission plan presents today's best estimate of the scientific, engineering and institutional information needed to make informed decisions as we proceed with developing a high-level waste disposal system," said Ben C. Rusche, director of DOE's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management. "It is a planning document, and as such, we will review it annually and revise it on an as-needed basis."

The mission plan describes DOE's program strategy to successfully meet the principal objective under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 to begin accepting spent fuel and high-level waste for disposal in deep, geologic repositories by January 31, 1998. It describes in detail the specific facilities and activities authorized by the act, in which DOE sees there are opportunities for improving performance of the waste management system and contingency plans.

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The plan was issued in draft more than a year ago for review by states, Indian tribes, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, other federal agencies and the public. A preliminary draft was widely circulated earlier. Based on comments received, the plan has been substantially expanded and revised. Attached is an outline of key points of the mission plan and a brief summary of key issues raised by the commenters and the resolution contained in the mission plan.

Reprints of comments received and responses to all comments are being published as companion volumes to the mission plan.

Copies of the "Mission Plan for Civilian Radioactive Waste Management Program" (Volume I), the "Record of Responses to Public Comments" (Volume II) and "Public Comments on the Draft Mission Plan" (Volume III) are being mailed directly to program participants including federal agencies, states, Indian tribes, industry representatives, public interest groups, the media and members of the public. Additional copies are available by writing to:

Mission Plan
Request Services
Technical Information Center
U. S. Department of Energy
P. O. Box 62
Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37831

Copies of the Mission Plan are also available for inspection at most DOE facilities including the:

Public Reading Room
Forrestal Building
Room 1E-190
U. S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20585

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Key Points of the
Mission Plan for the Civilian Radioactive
Waste Management Program

A. Background

1. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act states, "The Secretary shall prepare a comprehensive report, to be known as the mission plan, which shall provide an informational basis sufficient to permit informed decisions to be made in carrying out the repository program and the research, development, and demonstration programs required under this Act."
2. In addition, DOE added a discussion of program goals and objectives, strategy, facility activities, institutional activities and the program management system being implemented.

B. Program Strategy

1. Identifies "Authorized Plan" activities and/or the facilities authorized by Congress in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act which constitute a waste management system capable of accepting radioactive waste in 1998.
2. Identifies "Improved-Performance Plan"
3. Identifies Contingency Plans
4. Presents program baseline assumptions
5. Presents waste acceptance schedules for Authorized Plan and Improved Performance Plan

C. Repository Schedule

1. Maintains January 1998 as the date when repository will begin accepting high-level radioactive waste for disposal.
2. Articulates DOE Policy on the timing of the preliminary determination that sites are suitable for development as repositories. DOE will make this determination at the same time as the recommendation of the three sites for characterization.

D. MRS proposed as integral part of waste management system

E. New Chapter on "Institutional Plans-and-Activities" to expand on policy to promote full, open and timely sharing of information and describe process for conducting these activities.

F. All comments on draft Mission Plan, over 2500 in 102 letters from individuals, organizations, etc., are answered in a comment response document - Volume II.

G. All incoming comment letters are reprinted in Volume III.

DOE is planning to sink two exploratory shafts at each candidate site. The second shaft will be sized to support the safe operation of the underground testing program and will provide flexibility in the scope and duration of in situ testing.

7. Second Repository

Many commentors suggested that the Mission Plan provide more detail and schedule analysis for the second repository. Some suggested that the first and second repository schedules should be integrated and that the site nominations for the second repository should not occur before site selection for the first repository.

Revised schedules for both the first and second repositories are included in the Mission Plan. The schedules have been adjusted to make maximum benefit in the second repository program of key information and results from the first. Current plans call for DOE to recommend the first site for repository development before the sites for the second repository are nominated for characterization.

8. Monitored Retrievable Storage

DOE was requested to be more explicit about the criteria to determine whether Monitored Retrievable Storage (MRS) is needed. The utilities asked that the Monitored Retrievable Storage facility siting and licensing processes be established and initiated as soon as possible.

In the draft Mission Plan, the MRS was described as a backup to the repository in the event of major delays. Since issuance of the draft Mission Plan, analysis by DOE has led to the conclusion that an MRS facility should be an integral part of the total waste management system. Such a facility could perform spent fuel preparation and packaging functions at a central location before shipment to a repository for permanent disposal. Performance of these functions at an MRS facility centrally located to the majority of the commercial generators of spent fuel could contribute significantly to overall systems efficiency and timeliness while reducing the total shipment miles. The Mission Plan reflects the recent announcement of three potential sites for a proposed MRS facility and preparation of the MRS proposal to Congress required by the Act.

9. Transportation

Several commentors, primarily State representatives, criticized the general treatment of transportation complexities and importance as inadequate. Some portrayed the resolution of transportation issues as the most significant obstacle to siting and operating a repository. Among the issues most frequently raised were: prenotification to States and communities of waste shipments; emergency response capabilities; safety and security of transportation casks; and resolution of legal and regulatory conflicts.

DOE recognizes both concerns and is planning to meet both obligations. The Mission Plan discusses at length waste management systems scheduled to begin operation no later than 1998 to accept and dispose of commercially generated spent fuel and high-level radioactive waste in a manner that protects the health and safety of the public and maintains the quality of the environment. At the same time, however, DOE recognizes the need to do contingency planning in the event of program delays. These activities will continue and be expanded.

4. Repository Schedule

The overwhelming majority of comments about the repository schedule stated that it was too optimistic to be achievable. Reasons for lack of confidence in the schedule included: suspect sequencing of activities to meet 1998, near-term dates missed by the end of the Mission Plan comment period, and short public review periods for program documents. Commentors suggested that the reference schedule should be DOE's best estimate of what is achievable, not what would have to occur to meet the 1998 deadline.

DOE recognizes that the reference schedule portrayed in the Mission Plan is success-oriented and aggressive. DOE regards the Mission Plan as the vehicle to present today's best estimate of what is required to be done. If unforeseen problems develop or litigation delays the program, the schedule will be altered.

5. Site Characterization and Recommendation

Many commentors requested that the Mission Plan describe the site recommendation decision methodology and how program participants will contribute to the decision process. Commentors were divided with respect to DOE's position on the timing of the Act's requirement for the preliminary determination that sites are suitable for development as repositories.

Since the draft Mission Plan was issued in April 1984, DOE issued Draft Environmental Assessments on each of the nine potentially acceptable sites for the first repository. These documents discuss in detail the process by which the proposed recommended sites were selected. With regard to the preliminary determination that sites are suitable for development as repositories, the Mission Plan states that DOE intends to make that determination at the same time as the recommendation of three sites for characterization.

6. Need for Second Exploratory Shaft

Many comments were offered concerning the need for a second shaft at each characterized site. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) wanted additional information which justifies the large diameter of the second shaft. Many commentors, particularly State representatives, stated that the decision should be based on exploration or safety concerns and not on construction schedule savings.

MISSION PLAN FOR THE CIVILIAN RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES RAISED DURING REVIEW

The key issues that emerged during the review of the draft Mission Plan and DOE's proposed resolution, as presented in the Mission Plan, are as follows:

1. Institutional Relations

Many people commented on the imbalance in the draft Mission Plan between the amount of information and discussion on technical areas such as repository site geology versus institutional issues such as the appropriate role of States and affected Indian tribes in review of program documents. The draft Mission Plan was criticized for being overly optimistic in its assessment of problems with States, inadequate airing of public views, insufficiently involving States and Indian Tribes in decision-making, and providing inadequate educational activities and information especially on the Consultation and Cooperation (C&C) process. More information was requested on procedures for the "management plan" to resolve financial, political, legal and institutional conflicts.

In response, DOE added an entirely new chapter to Part I of the Mission Plan on Institutional Relations. This chapter reiterates and expands on DOE's policy to promote "full, open and timely sharing of information" and describes the process for conducting these activities.

2. Plans for Defense Waste

Nearly all parties -- States, environmental groups, utilities, etc. -- wanted more information on the plans to dispose of defense waste.

Since issuing the draft Mission Plan, DOE completed a comparative evaluation of disposing of defense waste in a separate defense-only repository, or putting it in the civilian repositories. This study concluded that there was no compelling need for a defense-waste-only repository and that a cost savings will result if defense waste were disposed of in a civilian repository. This report was forwarded to the President for his evaluation as required by the Act. On April 30, 1985, the President notified DOE that he found no basis to conclude that a defense-only repository is required and he directed the Secretary to proceed to dispose of defense waste in the civilian repositories in conformance with the Act. As reflected in the Mission Plan, this course of action is now being pursued.

3. Waste Acceptance Beginning in 1998

The comments in this area were almost evenly divided between those seeking a strong DOE commitment to begin accepting waste by 1998, and those opposing such a commitment. In general, the utilities favored the commitment citing DOE's obligation under the "Standard Contract for Disposal of Spent Nuclear Fuel and/or High-Level Radioactive Waste." The States and the environmental groups emphasized the need for sound, defensible decision-making regardless of time constraints.

The purpose of the Mission Plan is to provide an overview of program goals and an outline of current program policies and plans. The Mission Plan now incorporates a more detailed account of transportation issues than was contained in the draft Mission Plan. However, an in-depth discussion of the above issues is reserved for two supplementary documents: the Transportation Business Plan and the Transportation Institutional Plan scheduled for release in draft form later this year.

10. Need for Strong Management and Quality Assurance

Many reviewers advised that strong, centralized management is needed for program elements such as policy formulation, program planning, program implementation, funds control, legal affairs and coordination with other interested parties. Most of the concerns centered around the decision to execute the program through a network of decentralized operations offices. Many commentators, especially the NRC, felt the description of DOE's quality assurance program contained in the Mission Plan was inadequate.

DOE agrees that strong centralized management is necessary and has rewritten the Program Management Chapter to provide a more complete description of the system being implemented by the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM). The Mission Plan has clarified that while execution of the program by DOE operations offices and contractors is decentralized, overall policy formulation, program planning, and management control is centralized at Headquarters in Washington, D.C. A new section on Quality Assurance has been added to the Program Management Chapter to provide a more detailed discussion of the Quality Assurance activities.

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