

September 1, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of August 1, 2011, forwarding correspondence from your constituent, Mr. John Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell raises concerns regarding disposal of radioactive waste from the decommissioning of the Zion nuclear power plant in Illinois in what he believes to be a new facility in Utah, and the construction of water pipelines in the Great Basin. The NRC is able to provide you additional information on the first of his concerns. With regard to Mr. Mitchell's concern about the pipeline construction, NRC does not have regulatory authority in that area.

As Mr. Mitchell noted, the high-level radioactive waste, spent fuel rods, and a small quantity of highly irradiated metal from the decommissioning of the Zion nuclear power plant will be placed in shielded dry storage casks and stored safely at the Zion site in an interim spent fuel storage facility until it is transferred to a licensed geologic repository or other suitable facility. The bulk of the low-level radioactive waste generated during decommissioning will be transported via rail, with some quantities being transported by truck, to the existing low-level radioactive waste disposal site in Clive, Utah.

The Clive site has been in operation since the 1980s. The facility is operated by Energy Solutions pursuant to a license issued by Utah's Department of Environmental Quality. The site is licensed to receive and dispose of Class A low-level radioactive waste as described in Utah's regulations, which are comparable to federal regulations for land disposal of radioactive waste. Class A low-level waste is considered the least hazardous of the classes of waste defined in the regulations.

Please be assured that the State of Utah provides oversight over this facility to ensure protection of public health and safety. In addition, the NRC conducts periodic reviews of Agreement State programs, such as Utah's, to ensure that public health and safety are adequately protected and that Agreement State programs are compatible with the NRC's program.

Sincerely,

/RA/

R. W. Borchardt
Executive Director
for Operations

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R. W. Borchardt
Executive Director
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