

Nye County NWRPO Update

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Yucca Mountain Viability Assessment

Nye County's NWRPO works to protect the interests of its citizens in activities related to the transport and storage of nuclear waste in and through Nye County.

The NWRPO is committed to helping Nye County residents become fully informed about nuclear waste activities.

This "Update" is part of Nye County's efforts to influence the direction of existing and future Yucca Mountain actions through communication and information sharing.



On Friday, December 18, the U.S. Department of Energy publicly released a report entitled "*The Overview of the Viability Assessment of a Repository at Yucca Mountain.*" The document, which took over two years to produce, describes the U.S. nuclear waste problem and explains why the United States is considering Yucca Mountain for a monitored geologic repository for high-level nuclear waste.

The report details DOE's technical design process and performance assessment models for Yucca Mountain. Plans for completing a license application and estimated repository costs are included in the text of the document. Research highlights are described in Volumes 1 - 5. The bottom line result of the Performance Assessment is that no show stoppers have

been identified, to date, at Yucca Mountain. Although uncertainties remain about key natural processes and the repository design, DOE recommends that work towards a site suitability determination should go forward until 2001, when the Secretary of Energy will decide whether to recommend the site to the President.

Copies of the Viability Assessment Overview and full report will be available at all Nye County public libraries in early January. Full Text available at www.

DOE Responds to Governor's Concerns

In a December 4 letter to Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson, Nevada Governor Bob Miller requested that Yucca Mountain be removed from further consideration as a high-level waste repository. DOE responded to the Governor's letter on December 18.

Although the Secretary acknowledged Nevada's concerns, he stated clearly that "the Department disagrees with the conclusion that the site should be disqualified as a potential site for the disposal of high-level nuclear waste." The Governor's December 4 letter, which was co-signed by Governor-Elect Kenn Guinn, cited recent data related to possible

groundwater flow from the repository to the environment. Secretary Richardson responded, in part, with promises for additional studies. "We believe additional study is warranted," he wrote, "to gain a better understanding of the groundwater flow processes and the models utilized to assess those processes."

In response to Miller's concerns about earthquakes and volcanic activity, Richardson said that "the likelihood of such events during the first 10,000 years after closure is low. The likelihood of a large earthquake during the period of repository operations is even lower."

December 14 Early Warning Drilling Program Status Report

From November 30 to December 14, Nye County's Early Warning Drilling Program (EWDP), through its contractor, Boyles Bros., has brought more than \$4.5 million in equipment and materials into Nye County. Equipment includes five drilling rigs (two deep reverse circulation air rotary rigs, one auger rig, one specialized reverse air circulation hammer rig, and a coring rig), a fleet of pickup trucks, tender trucks, water trucks, and other support vehicles, well casing and screens, bits, tremie pipes, compressors and all necessary tools and equipment for operation and maintenance of the drilling equipment. The lump sum cost to low-bidder, Boyles Bros., was \$56,000, which is less than 30% of the cost proposed by the next-lowest bidder.

In terms of drilling projects, the EWDP is unusual. It is not a standard water drilling exercise. It is a

scientific investigation to determine the age and source of recharge to the groundwater, the exact depths and thicknesses of perched water zones, and the exact depth to the top of the regional water table. Between \$70,000 and \$180,000 in instrumentation equipment will be installed in each well so that exact depths to permeable zones can be established. Dual-wall drilling methods will be used so that subsurface samples collected are sure to meet rigid Quality Assurance requirements for a Yucca Mountain high-level nuclear waste repository. Specialized drilling equipment is needed to drill several of the wells to a depth of 2,500 feet.

The EWDP will spend more than \$200,000 on goods and services in Southern Nye County during Phase I. All EWDP funds come from DOE grants.

NYE County Comments on FFACO Public Involvement Plan

Nye County's Department of Natural Resources and Federal Facilities, NWRPO, submitted comments related to the U.S. DOE's "Nevada Test Site Federal Facility and Consent Order Public Involvement Plan" on December 14.

All of the Department of Energy's public participation efforts in the State of Nevada are based on the FFACO Public Involvement Plan. The Plan is intended to provide information on how the public can become involved in the Nevada Operations Office Environmental Management program, including environmental restoration, waste management, and energy technology development. The major goal of the DOE

Public Involvement Program is to establish and maintain a two-way exchange of information and ideas related to DOE/NVOO issues and priorities.

The Nye County NWRPO, under the direction of the Nye County Board of Commissioners, is a service and community oriented organization, which is fully involved in the oversight of the United States' nuclear waste disposal program.

Nye County comments to the Plan include concerns that DOE does not differentiate between the general public and local governments, that information distribution is not the same as public involvement in the decision making process, and that DOE does not offer a "feedback" loop for participants in the process.

News from the NWRPO Office.....

NOTICE: Beginning in January 1999, EWDP daily activity reports will be posted to NWRPO's website at www.nyecounty.com. If you are currently receiving hard copies or email versions of the reports, log on to the web in January! Our Website will also have a new look for the New Year - more program information, a brand new home page, and more links. We're excited about the changes, and we hope you will be, too!

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