

What's News at Yucca Mountain

Publication of Mineral County's Yucca Mountain Repository Planning and Oversight Program



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Transport of Nuclear Waste: Panel says shipments safe

WASHINGTON -- Thousands of shipments of highly radioactive nuclear waste can be conducted safely, a panel of scientists concluded in February, although it said the Department of Energy (DOE) has challenges to meet in shipping the waste to Yucca Mountain.

The report by a panel of the National Academy of Sciences is expected to carry considerable weight as the government moves toward developing a central repository in Nevada for used commercial reactor fuel and defense waste now kept in 39 states.

The study appeared to contain no potential showstoppers and few sharp edges, according to transportation analysts who reacted to the report. Officials from the state of Nevada found things to like, as did the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"In general, it reflected a lot of the recommendations the state has had for a number of years," said Bob Loux, executive director of Nevada Agency for Nuclear Projects.

Loux noted the academy called for full-scale safety testing for waste casks and a recognition that DOE faces "a huge impediment" because people perceive that nuclear waste will be dangerous as it passes through their communities.

On the other hand, Loux said, the scientists appeared to be supportive of a rural Nevada railroad line being considered for Yucca Mountain over the objections of the state and a number of ranchers along the corridor.

In one key recommendation, the panel said the DOE should not commence shipments until it finishes building a 319-mile railroad through rural Nevada to the Yucca site. Uncertain whether it can get such a line built in time, DOE has been looking at plans to ship radioactive material by truck through the state as a stopgap. *Source: Washington Bureau*



An empty container used to transport used nuclear fuel lies on its side after a rail car carrying it derailed Sept. 22 in a collision involving two trains at the CXS Frontier Rail-yard in Buffalo, N.Y. The empty container was not damaged and there was no release of radiation, the Department of Energy said. *Photo by The Associated Press*

Bush requests money for Yucca Mountain, reprocessing in budget

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Bush asked Congress on February 6th to increase spending on the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump, and requested \$250 million for a new nuclear fuel reprocessing initiative.

Energy Department officials said the new focus on reprocessing - which this country abandoned in the 1970s over fears of nuclear proliferation - would not detract from their commitment to completing the Yucca Mountain dump 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

"It is our great desire, and it is in the nation's interest, and it is in the interest of facilitating a nuclear renaissance, which we greatly need, that we get Yucca Mountain licensed and we get it open," Deputy Energy Secretary Clay Sell told reporters during a briefing on Bush's \$2.77 trillion 2007 budget plan.

Sell said the administration would be supporting legislation to speed construction of Yucca, which has stumbled over funding shortfalls, a controversy over fabricated scientific data, and a court's rejection of the government's original radiation safety standard.

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Reprocessing in Budget (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

Sell didn't elaborate, but congressional staffers said they expected the proposal to include funding changes for the project. The Bush administration has tried in the past, without success, to spend money on Yucca from a dedicated account that utilities pay into.

February's \$544 million request for Yucca Mountain in 2007 was \$100 million more than Congress approved for 2006, but less than Bush's \$650 million 2006 request. The budget for Yucca Mountain was \$577 million in 2004 and 2005.

The money for nuclear fuel reprocessing is the first step in a new administration effort to take a fresh look at how to deal with the thousands of tons of used reactor fuel piling up at U.S. commercial power plants, while also gaining control over future nuclear materials in developing countries where the demand for nuclear energy is expected to grow.

The plan calls for stepped up research into a "more proliferation resistant" type of reprocessing that proponents say will reduce dramatically the likelihood of theft or diversion.

The process would not produce pure plutonium, but a mixture of plutonium and neptunium that would make the separated elements more difficult to handle and, therefore, more secure.

The Bush proposal, called the Global Nuclear Energy

Partnership, envisions that U.S. companies eventually will sell reactors and fuel to developing countries with the stipulation that the fuel would be returned to the United States for reprocessing.

Nuclear scientists say that up to 90 percent of spent fuel can be recycled for reuse, reducing dramatically the need for geological disposal. But Sell said Yucca Mountain still will be necessary, and that recycled fuel that can't be used will be entombed in the repository, which is meant to hold 77,000 tons of nuclear waste.

Recycled fuel will be less radioactive, but Paul Golan, acting director of the Energy Department's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, said Yucca Mountain's design would not need to change to accommodate it.

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Rep. Shelley Berkley, D-Nev., expressed concerns about the recycling initiative. Reid said the proposal would "include plans to import nuclear waste from other countries and reprocess it here, which would involve transporting deadly waste across thousands of miles at a time when we have heightened concerns about nuclear proliferation."

"The Energy Department still must apply to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for a license to operate the dump, and the facility's projected opening date has slipped to 2012, at the earliest.

Bush's budget plan still must be approved by Congress. Source: Associated Press



Energy Department seeks control of land near Yucca

WASHINGTON -- A North Carolina senator who voted for Yucca Mountain four years ago said he now believes the Nevada nuclear waste repository should be put on a back burner while scientists explore new ways to reprocess spent nuclear fuel.

Sen. Richard Burr, a Republican, called for a "pause" on the repository. He suggested federal spending on underground nuclear waste disposal be frozen or reduced for the time being, while the government prepares to spend new millions on research into potentially promising alternatives.

"Maybe it is time for us to rethink based on what we know today versus what we knew a number of years ago when we made the decision on Yucca Mountain," Burr said. "I believe we should explore whether reprocessing is a better route."

In the meantime, Burr said, "we might be able to store sweet potatoes at Yucca Mountain."

The Energy Department's bid to license a Yucca Mountain repository has stalled since President Bush and Congress gave the go-ahead in 2002.

Technological advances now being promoted by the Bush

administration and key lawmakers like Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., are refocusing nuclear waste strategy.

Burr's change in position is evidence of this shift taking place in Congress, Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., said. Doubts about Yucca Mountain that used to be expressed only in cloakrooms now are becoming public, he said. "I think it is significant anytime you have an original supporter of Yucca Mountain now coming and saying there are serious problems and we shouldn't look for more money," Ensign said, predicting more senators will follow suit.

As a House member, Burr worked on Yucca bills as a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee and voted to designate the Nevada site for nuclear waste in 2002. In 2004 he was elected to the Senate from a state where five nuclear reactors supply 32 percent of electricity.

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But dozens of pending lawsuits against Yucca Mountain promise to "delay indefinitely any decisions on the movement of that waste," Burr said. "I try to be a realist.

"I think we need to make a decision whether we are going to go through a different course than Yucca for storage of current fuel," he said.

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., "has said for decades that Yucca Mountain is never going to happen and we are very happy to see that other senators are starting to see that fact," spokeswoman Sharyn Stein said.

Burr became the second senator to rethink support for

Yucca Mountain since September, when Sen. Robert Bennett, R-Utah, announced his position in favor of the project had changed. A majority of senators continue to publicly support the Nevada repository.

But with a growing emphasis on reprocessing, a Nevada repository as is presently being designed may not be the Nevada repository that is eventually put into use, Domenici, Senate Energy Committee chairman, said.

"Part of this is assuming that we are not going to be putting that same waste into Yucca," said Domenici. "We have to adjust but how much we would have to adjust I don't know yet."

Reprocessed nuclear waste is said to be volumes smaller and less toxic than the highly radioactive fuel rods planned to be buried at Yucca Mountain. France, Germany and Japan are among nations that currently reprocess.

Fuel rods now are removed from reactors and set aside after being utilized "once-through." Reprocessing proponents say fuel recycling technologies could wring up to 96 percent more energy.

Advanced reprocessing being studied in government laboratories may also be able to shape new fuel without producing plutonium byproducts capable of being used in nuclear weapons, they say. Critics say reprocessing is prohibitively expensive and unproven for nuclear nonproliferation. But President Bush has

gotten behind the effort, proposing \$250 million to get started on a research and development initiative called the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership.

DOE officials have tied Yucca Mountain to the GNEP initiative, but have not explained how the projects would be harmonized. Talking to reporters, Domenici also said that much is uncertain about how the two would fit together.

The Bush administration may provide more clues when it sends new legislation to Congress. DOE officials have briefed key senators and staffers but have not said when it will be introduced.

The Environment and Energy Daily, a Web-based publication, reported that industry officials expect the bill will authorize nuclear waste to be moved from reactor sites and stored on an interim basis at federal facilities possibly in Tennessee, Idaho, South Carolina, Washington or the Nevada Test Site.

DOE spokesman Craig Stevens said he would not confirm the report.



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Appearing before the Senate Energy Committee, Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman said GNEP could cost between \$20 billion and \$40 billion, and might rise to the \$62 billion once estimated by the National Academies of Science in a 1996 study.

Domenici raised the idea that money the nuclear power industry has been gathering in a government fund to build Yucca Mountain might be redirected to fuel reprocessing research that would achieve the same result. About \$20 billion sits in the fund.

Source: Las Vegas Sun



'pause' on repository (continued)

(Continued from page 3)

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New Yucca office director named

After nearly a year, Nye County has settled on a new director for its nuclear waste repository project office, naming soils and water consultant Dale Hammermeister to the post.

County Manager Michael Maher named Hammermeister as the selected candidate for the job after a week of interviewing finalists and the selection panelists coming to a consensus.

The panel was made up of Nye County Commission Chairwoman Candice Trummell, Commissioner Garry Hollis, Comptroller Marie Owens, Washington, D.C., consultant and lobbyist Rick Spees and HR director Danelle Shamrell.

Under the direction of the county commissioners, Hammermeister will be responsible for all aspects of the county's involvement in the nation's nuclear waste repository program at Yucca Mountain, insofar as it pertains to Nye County.

Hammermeister has a PhD in soils science from Oregon State University, a master of science in chemistry from Denver University and a B.A. in secondary education from the University of Washington.

He has held teaching posts as a secondary school teacher teaching science, as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guyana and as an assistant soils science professor at the University of Wisconsin in River Falls, Wis.

Hammermeister was also a research chemist with the U.S. Geological Service in Menlo Park, Calif. He has been a hydrologist for USGS for Superfund cleanup sites and at the Nevada Test Site. He was a project manager for Yucca Mountain studies and at a mine in Silver City, N.M.

He has also held management positions at a laboratory in Albuquerque, N.M, was section chief with REECO at the Nevada Test Site and technical director with Ecosystems Analysis Inc. in Tucson, Ariz.

More recently, Hammermeister was Nye County's site representative on geotechnical matters.

Maher said in a statement, "Dr. Hammermeister will make a significant impact in our community working with the internal and external partners of our nuclear waste repository program office." *Source: Pahrump Valley Times*

Yucca in need of repair after nine years

WASHINGTON - Yucca Mountain research facilities - from ground supports to railroad tracks - need repairs after just nine years of use, leaving critics wondering how the Energy Department could store nuclear waste there for thousands of years.

As part of a \$544 million Yucca budget proposal for 2007, Energy Department officials asked Congress for money for repairs at Yucca. That included \$9 million to restore the 5-mile, nine-year-old, U-shaped exploratory tunnel where researchers have been studying the mountain, department officials said.

The work includes planned improvements to a 6-foot wide ventilation shaft that runs the length of the tunnel. The department also wants to buy fire detection and alarm systems, which had never been installed in the tunnel.

The \$9 million request also includes grouting work on aging ground supports in the tunnel, as well as work to shore up the rail car system that ferries workers and visitors in and out. Rail cars that creep at top speeds of 10 mph have gone off the tracks because the rails are not stable, Energy Department spokesman Allen Benson said. No one has been injured in the derailments, he said.

Yucca managers also aim to upgrade the Yucca lighting system and level a south portal ramp.

"Everything in there is old," Benson said. "This is a safety issue."

Other work plans reflect the department's confidence that Yucca is a permanent government project, despite critics who doubt the repository will ever be licensed, much less constructed.

The Yucca budget proposal includes a \$21 million request to replace shabby single-wide trailers at Yucca's north portal with permanent structures. The new buildings would include a new operations center, a craft shop, a warehouse, and a fueling station.

A separate budget request - Benson could not say how much exactly - has been made for a second year of work on a fire station.

The next nearest station is 45 minutes away in Mercury, Benson said.

Benson again stressed that the new facilities were needed for the safety of Yucca workers.

Yucca critics have long argued that the proposed \$60 billion repository could not safely isolate high-level nuclear waste and prevent it from seeping into the environment. Yucca foes question how the government plans to maintain what would be a complex system of tunnels under the mountain.

The department has been studying Yucca Mountain, roughly 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, for years. Officials have said they plan to open it by 2012 as a burial ground for the nation's most radioactive waste, although critics say that is unlikely and predict it may never open.

Source: Las Vegas Sun

Mineral County High School Students Conduct Survey

During February and March Mineral County High School Students conducted a survey of local residents. The survey seeks to document the views of Mineral County residents on topics such as new sources of energy, and waste storage and transportation. The results of the survey will be published in June.

DOE's Civilian Radioactive Waste Management FY 2006 and FY 2007 Funding information

Customers who use nuclear power pay for the disposal of spent fuel. The federal government collects a fee of one mil (one-tenth of a cent) per kilowatt-hour of nuclear-generated electricity from utilities. This money goes into the Nuclear Waste Fund. In addition, Congress makes an annual appropriation from the General Fund of the Treasury to pay for disposal of defense-related high-level radioactive waste.

The Nuclear Waste Fund and the annual appropriation by Congress pay for the U.S. nuclear waste management program. Department of Energy, the state of Nevada, and local governments that could be affected by the potential repository receive money from the Nuclear Waste Fund through congressional appropriations. The General Accounting Office, an arm of the US Congress, is required by the Act to conduct annual audits of Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management. Additionally, financial audits are conducted annually by a public accounting firm.

DOE's FY2007 Program Management & Key Integration Planned Activities

- Utilize Sandia National Laboratories to manage and integrate scientific studies for the program
- Develop a nuclear safety culture, including improving design configuration control, effective issue resolution processes, and encouraging employees to identify issues
- Continue to implement project management improvements, including clear requirements definition and maintenance, and
- project control through earned value management system

For more information please see <http://www.ocrwm.doe.gov/pm/budget/money.shtml> .

FY 2006 Appropriated Funds and FY 2007 Budget Request Summary (dollars in millions)

	FY 2006 Approp.	FY 2007 Request
Yucca Mountain	\$305.9	\$355.4
Transportation	19.9	67.7
Prog Mgmt & Integration/Prog Direction	119.7	121.4
Integrated Spent Fuel Recycling Facilities	49.5	0.0
Total Program	495.0	544.5
Nuclear Waste Fund	99.0	156.4
Integrated Spent Fuel Recycling Facility	49.5	0
Defense Nuclear Waste Disposal	346.5	388.1

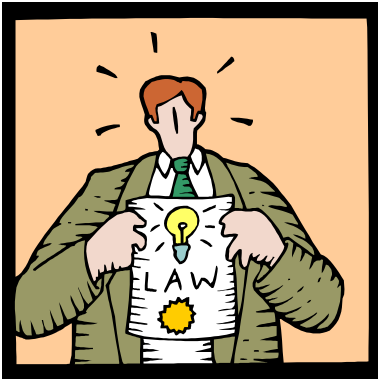
Source: www.ocrwm.doe

PFS gets N-storage license

WASHINGTON — Private Fuel Storage officially had its license in hand as of February 23, but several steps still need to be fulfilled before nuclear waste would come to Utah.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs needs to approve the lease for 820 acres of land on the Goshute Indian Reservation in Tooele County and the Bureau of Land Management needs to approve the use of land to build a transfer station to take waste off trucks and move it to the nuclear waste storage site.

William H. Ruland, deputy director of Licensing and Inspection Directorate in the Spent Fuel Project Office at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, sent a letter to John Parkyn, chairman of the board of Private Fuel Storage, L.L.C., formally approving the license. The commission had given a draft license to PFS the week of February 12th for it to review and return. It expires in 2026.



PFS spokeswoman Sue Martin said the BIA approved the lease in 1997 before the consortium of nuclear utilities even applied for a license, but it was on the condition the license be approved. Now that it has been, she said it should be able to sign off on the lease.

BLM is conducting a public comment period right now on whether allowing PFS to use public land would be in the public's best interest. Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, has encouraged every Utahn to write a letter saying it is not in the best interest because moving nuclear waste through the state to an area near an Air Force base is a bad idea.

Martin said PFS has been marketing the project to nuclear utilities for years but now the effort will continue.

"It is hard to sign on customers until you have a license," Martin said.

PFS is designed to temporarily store 40,000 tons of nuclear waste until the government opens the federal nuclear waste storage site at Yucca Mountain, 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. Several of PFS's financial backers suspended their support in December, saying they would continue to support Yucca Mountain. *Source: Desertnews.com*

Please visit Mineral County Nuclear Waste Oversight website where you will find information about the proposed Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository 90 miles north of Las Vegas. This website has current news links, info on transportation issues and links to other involved entities and information about Yucca Mountain.

www.mcnucprojects.com

DOE: Suspect Yucca Mountain work is sound, but will be redone

WASHINGTON (AP) - Work on the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump, though performed by federal employees who apparently made up facts, was scientifically sound, an Energy Department report said.

But the work will be redone anyway because it didn't comply with quality assurance rules. That will take months and could cost as much as several million dollars, said Paul Golan, acting director of the department's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management.

"We need to move forward based on work that meets our quality standards. And if that means redeveloping this work, taking the time and incurring the cost to do that, we just need to do that," Golan said in a conference call.

The Energy Department released the 144-page report nearly a year after disclosing the existence of e-mails written by U.S. Geological Survey hydrologists indicating they fabricated facts, deleted inconvenient data and kept one set of documents for themselves and another for quality assurance officials.

The e-mails were written from 1998 through 2004 by scientists using computer models to determine how quickly precipitation could make its way through the dump site in the desert 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. The dump is planned as a national repository for 77,000 tons of used commercial reactor fuel and defense waste now stored at sites in 39 states.

The Geological Survey validated Energy Department conclusions that water seepage was relatively slow, so radiation would be less likely to escape. That led Nevada lawmakers and other Yucca Mountain opponents to contend the scientists were changing data to reach a predetermined conclusion.

The Energy Department's report, which was reviewed by three outside experts, found no problems with water infiltration rates estimated by the Geological Survey scientists. The conclusions were corroborated by other data and were comparable to findings by other scientists studying similar environments around the country, the report said. It found no problem with the basis for the Energy Department's 2002 recommendation of Yucca Mountain as the site for a nuclear waste dump.

However, Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico will redo the computer models because quality assurance rules weren't complied with, Golan said. The lab started the work in September and is scheduled to finish by summer.

Nevada officials dismissed the report as a whitewash.

"The DOE, which failed to prevent the falsification of scientific data on Yucca Mountain projects in the first place, now wants to us to believe that the falsifications made no difference in the quality of the work. That's absurd," said Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev.

Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., called the report "laughable" and "ridiculous."

The Energy Department is trying to recover from a series of problems with the project, including a federal court's ruling that overturned the government's original radiation protection standards for the dump.

Project managers no longer offer estimates as to when the dump might open; as of a year ago, the most optimistic estimate was 2012. Golan said he couldn't say when the Energy

(Continued on page 8)

Yucca Mountain work (continued)

(Continued from page 7)

Department might submit an application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for an operating license.

He also couldn't say whether the Geological Survey controversy has delayed the project. Separately, a redesign has been required by the Energy Department's decision to use a different kind of packaging to hold nuclear waste buried in the dump. *Source: Associated Press*

Yucca Mountain backers get assurance

WASHINGTON -- The Energy Department does not plan to divert money from Yucca Mountain to research other forms of nuclear waste disposal, a DOE official told senators at a hearing in March.

The Bush administration has linked the proposed Nevada repository to development of new reprocessing technologies for nuclear spent fuel, but acting repository chief Paul Golan said Golan responded to a concern by Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Inhofe, a repository supporter, said he wanted assurance that a new administration reprocessing effort, the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, "should not deter the forward progress of Yucca Mountain."

The idea that the reprocessing proposal might tap into the nuclear waste fund set aside for Yucca Mountain has been raised. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., has speculated about the possibility.

Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., a repository supporter, said he was worried that the proposal would "divert managerial attention" from Yucca Mountain and money that utility ratepayers have been setting aside for repository construction, more than \$20 billion.

The hearing before Inhofe's committee gave Yucca Mountain critics a new chance to cite flaws in the repository project, while Inhofe and other supporters urged DOE to keep the project moving forward.

Critics, including both Nevada senators and the state's nuclear waste director, focused on radiation safety rules being developed by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The proposed EPA standard would allow somebody living on the outskirts of Yucca Mountain to be exposed to 350 millirem of radiation annually, increasing the odds of contracting cancer, said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif.

William Wehrum, EPA acting assistant administrator for air and radiation, defended the agency's work. He said the action would limit radiation doses for a period up to 1 million years.

The 350-millirem level is no higher than people living in other parts of the country are exposed to from "natural levels" of radiation, Wehrum said.

The level would take effect only after the first 10,000 years of repository operations, he said. Before then, an annual dose limit of 15 millirem would be in effect.



EPA officials have said that a routine chest X-ray emits 10 millirem and that a mammogram emits 30 millirem.

Bob Loux, executive director of the Nevada Agency for Nuclear Projects, said the Yucca Mountain program has been delayed for so long that the EPA would have time to formulate a new radiation safety standard.

Ensign and Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., promoted their bill that would require DOE to shelve the Yucca Mountain project and keep spent fuel stored in dry casks at reactor sites.

reactor sites.

Yucca Mountain "is fraught with scientific, technical and geological problems," Reid said. "Our bill guarantees all Americans that our nation's nuclear waste will be stored in the safest way possible."

But Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., questioned the safety of keeping nuclear waste at power plants and said such storage "is a perfect dirty-bomb site."

"We do need to look into our choices," DeMint said. "We assume we can leave things the same and be safer rather than moving ahead like we have been trying to do for a number of years." *Source: Las Vegas Review Journal*

This newsletter is a publication of the Mineral County Repository Planning and Oversight Program. Mineral County is one of ten affected units of local government involved in the proposed Yucca Mountain Repository. Funding provided to Mineral County is paid by users of electricity generated by nuclear power plants. Under a general contract with nuclear generating utilities, the federal government collects a fee of one mill (one-tenth of a cent) per kilowatt-hour from utility companies for nuclear generated electricity. The money goes into the Nuclear Waste fund which is used to fund all program related activities. (Note) The articles in this newsletter may not necessarily reflect the positions or opinions of the Mineral County Board of Commissioners.

For more information on Mineral County's program contact Linda Mathias (below) or for the repository program you can also contact U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Yucca Mountain, Site Characterization Project Office at (702) 794-1444 www.ymp.gov, or the Nevada Agency for Nuclear Project, Nuclear Waste Project Office, Capital Complex, Carson City, Nevada 89570, (775) 687-3744 or visit them at their web site at www.state.nv.us/nucwaste.

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Additional copies of this newsletter are available at the Mineral County Nuclear Projects Office located in the Mineral County Courthouse or the Mineral County Library. Copies can also be downloaded from the website. <http://www.mcncuprojects.com>. Questions and/or comments are welcome.