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Board Sets Sights on Suitability

The Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board has planned an in-depth look at site suitability and related issues for its October 12, 1994, meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada. Specifically the Board is interested in how the Department of Energy's (DOE) proposed program approach (PPA) will affect the process for determining site suitability and the subsequent procedure for submitting an application for a license to construct a permanent repository for commercial spent fuel and high-level waste at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. The one-day meeting, which will begin at 8:00 A.M., will be held at the Alexis Park Hotel, 375 East Harmon, Las Vegas, Nevada 89109; tel: 702-796-3300; fax: 702-796-4334. The meeting is open to the public.

The PPA calls for a decision on "technical site suitability" in 1998 followed in 2001 by an application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for a license to begin construction of a repository. Daniel Dreyfus, director of the DOE Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management will kick off the session with a presentation on the fiscal year 1995 program and outlook. Following Dr. Dreyfus will be presentations on issues related to technical site suitability by representatives of the Department of Energy, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, State of Nevada, the Nuclear Energy Institute, and TRW Environmental Safety Systems, Inc. (the M&O).

A highlight of the day will be a discussion on the roles of the natural and engineered barriers in the waste management system, including the extent to which they should be addressed in determining site suitability. J. Van Miegroet from the Belgian National Institute for Radioactive and Fissile Materials (ONDRAF/NIRAS) and Edward Patera, formerly with Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA/OECD) and currently at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), will discuss the approach some countries other than the U.S. have taken towards resolving this issue.

Following their presentations, some of those who presented earlier in the day will be joined in a round-table discussion by other knowledgeable people, including Felton Bingham (Sandia National Laboratories), Julie Canepa (Los Alamos National Laboratory), Willis Clarke (Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory), Thomas Cotton (TRW), James Curtiss (Winston and Strawn), William Dudley (U.S. Geological Survey), William Magavern (Public Citizen), Gene Roseboom (U.S. Geological Survey), Martin Steindler (Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste-NRC), and Chris Whipple (Board on Radioactive Waste Management-NAS).

Specific topics that will be addressed during the meeting include the PPA process for determining site suitability; the DOE's priorities in exploration and testing and data collection, and the

rationale for those priorities; the DOE's waste isolation strategy; specific site-suitability issues (including the use of expert judgment); and those features, events, and processes that could pose a serious challenge to Yucca Mountain's viability as the site of a potential repository.

The Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board was created by Congress in the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 1987 to evaluate the technical and scientific validity of activities undertaken by the DOE in its program to manage the disposal of the nation's spent nuclear fuel and defense high-level waste. In that same legislation, Congress directed the DOE to characterize a site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, for its suitability as a potential location for a permanent repository for the disposal of that waste.

Transcripts of the meeting will be available on computer disk or on a library-loan basis in paper format from Victoria Reich, Board librarian, beginning November 28, 1994. For further information, contact Frank Randall, External Affairs, 1100 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 910, Arlington, Virginia 22209; Tel: 703-235-4473; Fax 703-235-4495.