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Nevada gets support from 13 public interest groups in battle against DOE's Yucca Mountain Project

CARSON CITY – Nevada officials said today that 13 local, regional and national public interest organizations have filed statements with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission supporting a motion submitted by the state of Nevada calling for the public release of all of the U.S. Department of Energy's key documents related to its Yucca Mountain Project.

The motions and responses are part of a pre-licensing process being conducted by NRC's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, which is seeking to establish a process for a possible future licensing proceeding related to a nuclear waste dump proposed for Nevada's Yucca Mountain. By law, this process must be open, publicly accessible and fair to all participants.

Bob Loux, executive director of Nevada's Agency for Nuclear Projects, said DOE has been unwilling to provide results of studies and calculations regarding its assessment and decisions relating to the Yucca Mountain Project. DOE intends to file a license application to NRC no later than next June. By law, he said DOE must make all of its relevant documents available at least six months beforehand.

Instead, he said DOE has declared to a licensing board at NRC that it intends to certify that it has complied with this law, "when in fact many crucial studies will still be incomplete or withheld." Loux said missing documents include DOE's Total System Performance Assessment (TSPA) of the repository, the complex model upon which DOE will attempt to demonstrate compliance with federal safety standards. Also missing will be key technical reports necessary to support the TSPA.

"The TSPA and related technical reports in reality are the foundation for the license application," Loux said. "It is mind-boggling that DOE would think it can somehow exempt them from the six-month requirement."

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Because withholding these and other documents would neither comply with the rules nor allow public access to critical information on the safety of Yucca Mountain, Nevada filed a motion with the licensing board to require DOE to make all relevant documents available at least six months before it files its license application. The nuclear industry, DOE and the NRC's staff each opposed Nevada's motion.

Of the 13 groups that supported Nevada's motion, five are based in Nevada, five are from regions where nuclear power plants now operate, and three are national organizations based in Washington, D.C.

Awareness of Yucca Mountain and its many technical and managerial problems has increased recently due to governmental and industry efforts to prompt a revival of nuclear power plant construction in the United States.

State officials, along with Nevada's congressional delegation, favor storing nuclear waste at the reactor sites where it is generated. Annual statewide surveys commissioned by the state have shown that Nevadans have remained consistent in opposing the Yucca Mountain Project, with more than 70 percent in recent years stating they are against a project that state officials contend is "fatally flawed."

A recent Massachusetts Institute of Technology survey of 1,200 people across the country showed most Americans agree with Nevadans. The MIT report entitled "Public Attitudes Toward America's Energy Options: Insights for Nuclear Energy," concluded that "fewer than one in five respondents felt that the nation should definitely use this (Yucca) facility." Another 25 percent of Americans surveyed by MIT would allow the project to proceed but "only if the state of Nevada agrees." A plurality of respondents (39 percent) thought that "we should not use the facility at all."

"These results are in stark contrast to previous national surveys that found that a large percentage of people had never even heard of Yucca Mountain," Loux added.

Another indication of the rapidly growing awareness of possible fatal technical problems and organizational issues associated with Yucca Mountain is seen in the number of individuals and organizations nationwide opposing the repository and plans to transport nuclear waste to the project. According to Kevin Kamps, radioactive waste expert for a national organization called Beyond Nuclear, "We know of more than 700 groups opposed to the dump. It might be closer to a thousand now."

For more information on Nevada's opposition to the Yucca Mountain Project, visit www.state.nv.us/nucwaste/.

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