

GLOBAL RESOURCE ACTION CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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SEP 04 2001

August 31, 2001

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Dear Ms. Hanlon:

I urge you to cancel the Yucca Mountain preliminary site recommendation hearings set for September 5th, 12th and 13th. There are serious technical and regulatory issues regarding the Yucca site development plan which need to be explored before meaningful meetings can take place. At this time, I think it would be impossible for either the Department of Energy or for any member of the public to make a considered, complete judgement on the site recommendation.

Yucca Mountain was originally selected as a potential waste repository because it was felt that the site offered significant enough "natural barriers" to contain the dangerous nuclear waste that would be stored there. Department of Energy studies, though, have increasingly revealed that these barriers are not sufficient to protect the fresh water aquifer that lies beneath Yucca Mountain. The aquifer is an important source of drinking water for area residents, whose health would be placed in grave jeopardy by potential contamination.

Any plans to engineer a system to bolster the natural barrier system at Yucca Mountain must be separately and very carefully reviewed before the site recommendation process can continue. More consideration also needs to be given to the fact that barriers, both natural and man-made, will be vulnerable to the considerable amount of seismic activity in the area. With 600 significant seismic events within a 50 mile radius in the past 15 years, Yucca Mountain does not seem the ideal site for a nuclear waste repository that the DOE makes it out to be. The environmental risks of transporting 70,000 metric tons of hazardous waste to Yucca Mountain through America's backyards and playgrounds have also not been fully detailed.

These issues all need to be explored more fully and presented to the public more clearly before meaningful site recommendation hearings can take place. The haste with which the current set of hearings has been called and the measurably short notice on which they have been announced seems designed to minimize meaningful public participation in the site recommendation process. This leads one to believe that the Department of Energy wishes to minimize public participation because it fears that any participation by an informed public would take the form of vociferous protest.

The site recommendation process for Yucca Mountain must be objective, it must take all of the salient facts into account, and it must encourage the participation of the public. Canceling the upcoming site recommendation hearings is the only way to insure that this happens. I urge you to cancel the site recommendation hearings immediately.

Sincerely,

Alice Slater
President