



## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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EIS000220

### Talking Points for Use on Yucca Mountain Draft Environmental Impact Statement

**1) The draft EIS reinforces the scientific consensus that a geologic repository is the best way to safely isolate used nuclear fuel and nuclear byproducts from U.S. Defense programs.**

- An extraordinary body of credible and conservative scientific evidence continues to support moving forward with the Yucca Mountain project.
- As was the case in the Yucca Mountain Viability Assessment completed eight months ago, DOE did not find any “showstoppers” in completing the draft EIS.
  - Yucca Mountain has undergone scientific study for over a decade. It is the most extensively studied piece of property in the world.
  - The draft EIS is the result of a comprehensive evaluation of the environmental affects of a potential repository.
  - Scientific facts, not emotional reactions and conjecture, governed the process. DOE Secretary Bill Richardson has promised a scientifically based recommendation.
- Potential long-term release of radiation from the repository are well within the proposed limits set by the Environmental Protection Agency and Nuclear Regulatory Commission to safeguard the public and the environment. Annual exposures are expected to be less than 1 percent of what a typical American receives from natural sources.
- Working together, the natural and man-made barriers will keep water away from the used fuel for thousands of years.
- For 10,000 years, people living near Yucca Mountain will receive little or no increase in the amount of radiation to which they are exposed—a small fraction of the limits allowed by the state of Nevada.
- The EIS contains the latest scientific information and analysis gained since the completion of the Energy Department’s Yucca Mountain Viability Assessment eight months ago.

1  
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on page 2

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### YUCCA MOUNTAIN DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (DEIS)

#### Central Management and Disposal of Waste

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 directing the Department of Energy to build a deep geologic disposal facility is sound public policy. Common sense dictates that it is better to manage nuclear waste at one central location rather than at many.

The Yucca Mountain Draft Environmental Impact Statements finds that a central repository is far safer than having spent fuel stored at 72 commercial sites and 5 U.S. Department of Energy sites in 36 states.

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Worldwide scientific consensus supports deep geologic disposal as the best way to isolate spent nuclear fuel and U.S. defense high-level waste.

The responsibility for managing spent fuel and high-level radioactive waste should not be shifted to future generations, but should be taken care of by those who benefited from its use. Nuclear technologies currently supply 20 percent of our electricity, provide for scientific research that enhances the quality of our lives, and assure our national security.

#### Federal Obligation to Take Fuel from Utilities

Seventeen years ago, the federal government made a deal with electricity consumers. In exchange for payments to the Nuclear Waste Fund, Congress directed the Department of Energy to begin taking spent fuel from utilities by January 31, 1998.

Since 1982, consumers of electricity generated by nuclear energy have committed more than \$16 billion to the Nuclear Waste Fund to pay for the repository.

Three federal court rulings have reaffirmed that the Department of Energy has a legal obligation to accept spent fuel, but the federal repository program missed the 1998 deadline. In fact, the repository is 12 years behind schedule and is not planned to open until 2010, at the earliest.

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act is also clear relative to permanent storage of High Level Waste generated as part of our Nation's nuclear weapons program. Much of this waste is being vitrified at the Defense Waste Processing Facility across the river at the Savannah River Site(SRS). The glass 'logs' of this vitrified waste are being stored at SRS until the National Repository is opened. We want to see this waste moved on schedule to the repository. Storage facilities limit the number of these "logs" which can be temporarily stored at SRS and without the repository, could significantly impact the closing schedule for the liquid waste tanks. Further delays in the Yucca Mountain project are not in our best interest and will add billions of dollars cost to the High Level Waste Program.

1  
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on page 3

The findings of the Environmental Impact Statement support moving forward with the Yucca Mountain project as the national repository. There is no scientific reason for the government not to honor its obligation.

### Why Yucca Mountain?

Yucca Mountain is the most extensively studied piece of rock in the world. The findings of the EIS are based on an extraordinary body of scientific evidence.

The Environmental Impact Statement identified substantial societal benefits of a central repository at Yucca Mountain.

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DOE has concluded that it will be more harmful to leave spent fuel at nuclear plant sites, especially if effective long-term regulatory controls cannot be maintained for thousands of years after the plants have shut down.

There is a tremendous cost savings, ranging from \$25 billion to \$4.8 trillion, when spent fuel is moved to a central location where it can be managed more efficiently.

Using engineered and natural barriers, the Yucca Mountain repository will protect public health and safety and the environment for thousands of years.

Possible releases of radiation from the repository will be a small fraction of the proposed limits set by the Environmental Protection Agency and Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Furthermore, these limits are set conservatively low to provide a high level of health and safety protection.

### Safely Transporting Spent Fuel and High Level Waste

Much has been made of the potential dangers of shipping spent nuclear fuel. During the past 30 years, nearly 3,000 shipments of spent nuclear fuel have been moved safely. During the same time, 700 shipments of U.S. Navy spent nuclear fuel have traveled without incident. Although we have not begun to ship any canisters of vitrified waste, these canisters will be shipped and transported similar to spent fuel in specialized containers similar to those used for shipping spent fuel.

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Spent fuel travels in robust containers designed specifically to withstand extreme accident conditions such as a fire, train collision or highway crash.

Both the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Transportation strictly regulate shipments of spent nuclear fuel. Similar Department of Transportation regulations will govern the shipments of the containers holding the canisters of the vitrified waste.

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on page 4

The Department of Transportation has developed a comprehensive training program for handling emergencies involving radioactive materials shipments.

### Nuclear Energy in Georgia

Nuclear energy supplies an estimated 30 percent of the electricity generated in Georgia. Nationally, nuclear power accounts for about 20 percent of electricity production.

There are over 1,300 tons of spent fuel stored at two commercial nuclear plants, the Edwin Hatch 1 & 2 Plants in Baxley and the Alvin Vogtle Plants 1 & 2 in Waynesboro, operated by Southern Nuclear Operating Company.

Electricity consumers in the state of Georgia have paid over \$516 million into the Nuclear Waste Fund.

Delays in the federal repository program have had a direct impact here in Georgia—the Edwin Hatch Nuclear Plant in Baxley will soon run out of space in its spent fuel storage pool. The plant must build metal containers to expand its storage capabilities at additional expense to consumers.

The transportation of spent fuel has been an issue in the Georgia General Assembly. Several bills have been introduced that would, if enacted, make it very difficult to ship spent fuel.

The Georgia legislature has invested significant tax payer dollars to ensure that our enforcement and response personnel are well prepared to deal with all types of hazardous materials transportation emergencies. Georgia regulators will oversee these spent fuel shipments. Furthermore, the Department of Energy has worked with state officials all over the country to plan for shipments to a national repository and will provide planning and oversight funds before shipments begin.

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