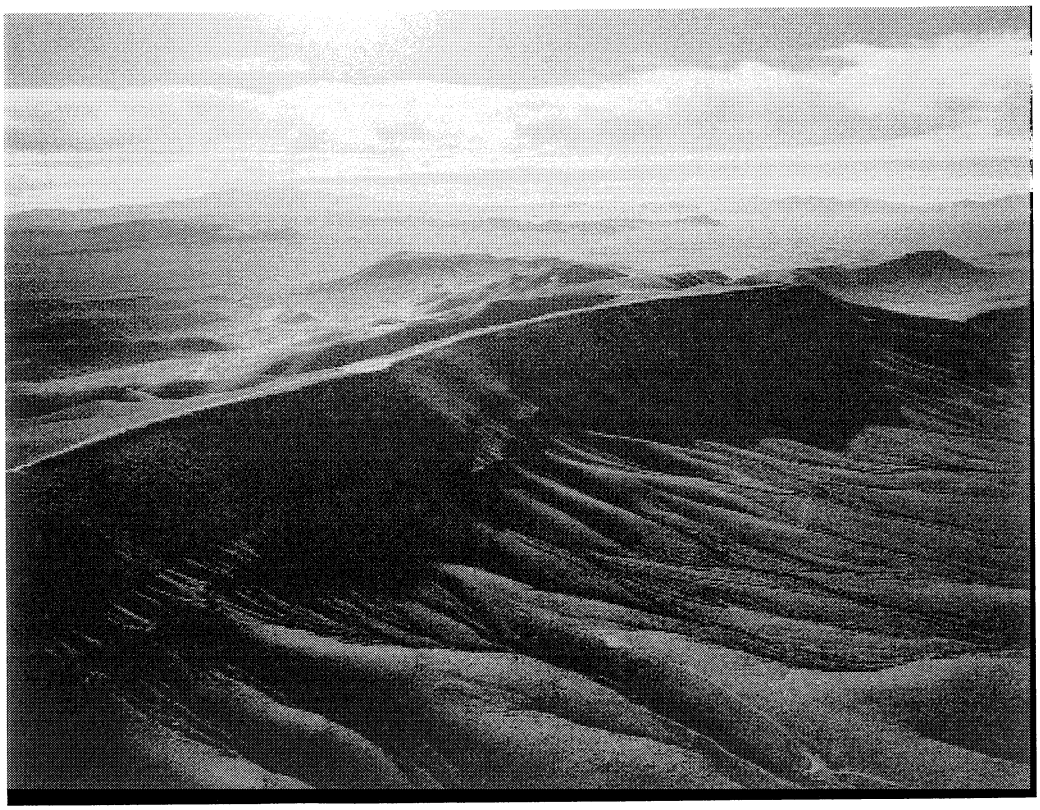
A MOUNTAIN OF TROUBLE: *A NATION AT RISK*

REPORT ON IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED YUCCA MOUNTAIN HIGH-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE PROGRAM



Prepared by
The Nevada Agency for Nuclear Projects
Office of the Governor

February 2002

Volume I

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PREFACE

Reading the following report on how the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste program will affect people and their communities in Nevada and across the country, one cannot help but be struck by the differences – perhaps better described as a perceptual abyss – between how this program is characterized by Secretary of Energy in his recommendation that the Nevada site be developed as a repository, and how the same program is viewed and experienced by the people of Nevada and other affected states.

There are profound and irreconcilable differences between the Department of Energy's (DOE) and Nevada's views of Yucca Mountain reality. These differences are critically important to understand why there is such strong and intractable opposition to the program, and why DOE and its commercial nuclear industry supporters have failed so abysmally in grasping the fundamental flaws of the program.

The overriding flaw that has continually characterized DOE's approach to the Yucca Mountain program and to issues surrounding the massive national nuclear waste shipping campaign required to make the program work has to do with the fact that, from the beginning, DOE has viewed the program not from the perspective of determining whether it ***should*** go forward – i.e., whether the Yucca Mountain site is suitable and whether HLW transportation can be done safely in a publicly acceptable way – but rather from the perspective of ***how*** to make the program and its various elements work, despite all the flaws and shortcomings.

This world view has had profound implications not only for how the Yucca Mountain site characterization program was configured and implemented and how the Department has approached the problems of waste transportation, but it also conditioned how DOE viewed – and continues to view – criticism and concerns regarding suitability and safety matters. Put simply, any view that suggests Yucca Mountain and the associated waste shipping campaign are fundamentally flawed and, perhaps, cannot or should not be "fixed" is dismissed out of hand. After all, the goal, in DOE's reality, is to make the program work by whatever means necessary and at any cost.

This view of reality explains, although it does not excuse, how the DOE program and the Secretary of Energy could have missed – or ignored – impacts as significant, far reaching, and profound as those chronicled in the following pages. It also goes a long way towards explaining the escalating levels of official and public opposition to the Yucca Mountain program over the years and the frustration on the part of Nevadans and others in having their concerns and objections constantly ignored and brushed aside. They simply did not fit into DOE's reality.

This report paints a very different picture of the reality that is the Yucca Mountain program and its implications for Nevada and the nation. This is not a program that can be "fixed" or that can be made to work by the application of generous doses of creative engineering and best guesses. It is not a program whose impacts can be dismissed as unimportant because they stand in the way of getting the job done. If there is a single

conclusion to be drawn from this report, it is that the reality of Yucca Mountain is one of massive, pervasive, unavoidable, and unmitigable impacts to Nevada and the nation.

This conclusion leads to another important fact that provides context for the report. The report was done solely to inform the Secretary of Energy, the President, members of Congress, and other interested parties about the severe and widespread damage the Yucca Mountain program would do to the country and to Nevada if it is permitted to go forward. The report does not seek to make a case for mitigation, compensation, or benefits. It is Nevada's position that there is no form or amount of compensation that will make this fatally flawed and dangerous program acceptable, for Nevada or for the nation as a whole. The only way to "fix" the program is to acknowledge that it is unfixable and, thereby, permit the nation to move on and consider other, more appropriate, less damaging, and more promising approaches to managing the disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level waste.

Carson City, Nevada
February 2002

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