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Lone Pine P...*

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COMMENTS OF CHARLES S. THISTLETHWAITE, AICP
INYO COUNTY PLANNING DIRECTOR PRESENTED AT THE
NOVEMBER 4, 1999 DOE HEARING ON THE YUCCA MOUNTAIN REPOSITORY DEIS

I'm Chuck Thistlethwaite, Planning Director of Inyo County, California. I am also Executive Officer of the Inyo Local Agency Formation Commission which coordinates the formation and services of special districts here in Inyo County.

1. DOE'S NEPA RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1 [Federal agencies must integrate the NEPA process with other environmental laws and list in the DEIS all federal permits, licenses and other entitlements needed by the proposed action. To the fullest extent possible agencies are encouraged to integrate the NEPA processes with the review process established by these other laws (40 CFR 1502.25 (a)). These include Section 4(f) of the Transportation Act of 1966 (49 USC 303), the Comprehensive Environmental Response and Liability Act of 1980 (43 USC 9601), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (42 USC 692).

Context and significance of the proposed action including unique characteristics, degree of controversy, cumulative and related effects are not adequately addressed in the DEIS (40 CFR 1508.27).

2. EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- 2 [The communities along California State Route 127 constitute the most isolated populations in Inyo County. Assistance with roadway incidents must come from the Inyo County Sheriff Unit at Shoshone, Park Service Rangers dispatched out of Cow Creek near Furnace Creek, or California Highway Patrol also coming out of Death Valley or out of Pahrump, Nevada. Some sections of 127 are within a few minutes of law enforcement and fire suppression, but most of the route lies one to three hours from any public assistance. To deal with major roadway incidents, County Sheriff units are sent from Lone Pine; three hours away from the closest segment of 127.

A single Volunteer Fire Protection District that is, at present, without funding serves Tecopa, Shoshone, and Death Valley Junction. In California new taxes must be passed by a 2/3rds majority and just this Tuesday an election on a parcel tax to keep the District functioning failed.

In cases of a serious toxic or radiological release in Inyo County, special response teams have to be brought in from either San Bernardino or Bakersfield, a process which takes a minimum of four hours, assuming that the response team is not occupied elsewhere.

The closest medical facility of any note is in Pahrump, which is a minimum of thirty minutes from the closest segments of the road and several hours away from the furthest. The nearest hospital facilities are in Las Vegas.

3 [The southeast County has recently seen several highway accidents involving non-nuclear hazardous waste. One incident with a leaking toxic waste truck resulted in the responders being exposed to toxic levels of waste, followed by hospitalization and ongoing medical treatment. The time delay in getting toxic waste expertise into the region was the reason of for the severity of the incident. In another area, a hazardous waste truck failed to negotiate a turn near a rest stop, rolled over and crushed a picnic facility. Our confidence in truck transportation for dangerous materials on remote, narrow, two lane roads is not high. The DEIS is silent on this issue.]

3. ROAD CONDITIONS

3 cont'd. [State Highway 127 itself is not an engineered route, most of it originated as an historic wagon trail that was paved over a period of time. Inyo County's recent survey of the route from its junction in the south with Interstate 15 at Baker to its junction with U.S. Highway 95 in the north revealed many unbanked, unsigned high-speed turns, numerous blind rises where visibility is limited, sustained grades in excess of modern standards, and dozens of washes crossing both over and under the pavement. The route passes through four towns; two of which include sharp 90-degree turns in the middle of town.

In the event of an incident, there are few alternate routes useful to diverting commercial and passenger traffic around accident or clean-up sites. For long sections of 127, there is no alternate route whatsoever.]

4. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

3 cont'd. [There are approximately 1000 acres of land in the vicinity of Death Valley Junction that is proposed for released to the Timbisha-Shoshone tribe for their use. If developed to mixed residential and commercial uses, this territory could host an unknown number of additional residents and contribute significantly to traffic on Route 127.]

5. EIS TREATMENT OF THE STATE ROUTE 127 CORRIDOR

3 cont'd. [The status of this corridor with respect to Yucca Mountain shipments is not addressed in any meaningful fashion by the EIS. We don't see any mitigation in the EIS to compensate for the hazard which the waste would impose upon responders, travelers or residents of the region. Conditions on possible primary and secondary routes in California are not evaluated and no attempt is made to develop and weigh alternatives for getting nuclear waste originating in California into Yucca Mountain.

As it stands, the isolation and current configuration of southeast County roadways cannot reasonably and safely support the demands of a 25-year nuclear waste transport campaign. The EIS provides insufficient information to allow us to assess repository operations on County residents or determine our risk in the larger context of the entire national transportation effort.

Unless State Route 127 is officially dismissed from consideration for the transport of high-level waste and spent nuclear fuel, the DEIS at minimum needs to be amended to evaluate risks associated with the route, propose measures to offset those risks, and identify the expected source of funding of these measures.]