EIS001222

February 1, 2000

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Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management
U.S. Department of Energy
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FEB 08 2000

Dear Ms. Dixon:

I am writing in regard to the Department of Energy's proposal to transport high-level radioactive waste from various locations across the country to Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

I recommend that this proposal be dropped immediately and permanently for the following reasons.

1 (1) The Yucca Mountain site proposed to hold the nuclear waste is not geologically stable. In 1992 an earthquake of magnitude 5.6 struck within ten miles of the mountain. This suggests that larger quakes are possible in the region. Such larger quakes could damage the containers in which the waste is stored, allowing the waste to leak out and contaminate the surrounding area. Other geological processes known to occur in the vicinity are volcanism and dramatic rises in the level of the water table, either of which can breach container integrity and spread radiation throughout the surrounding area. This is of particular concern because the half-lives of many of the isotopes in the waste are extremely long, in the thousands and millions of years.

2 (2) Any containers holding the waste are vulnerable to decay during the extremely long time that the waste continues to be hazardous (thousands to millions of years). Because many containers could begin to leak at about the same time, it may be impossible to send people in to repair damaged containers without their receiving a fatal dose of radiation. This could allow contamination to spread into the surrounding area. Furthermore, leaks could occur long after our civilization has died out, leaving no one to take proper action to prevent large-scale releases.

(3) If containers do leak and cannot be repaired, it is possible that a sufficient concentration of radioactive material could exist at some point to begin a chain reaction which could lead to a very serious nuclear explosion and spreading of radioactive particles over a large portion of the US and the world.

3 (4) A single site with such a high concentration of nuclear materials will be very attractive to terrorists who want such materials for weapons. It is not possible to prevent a security breach over the length of time that the materials will be hazardous.

4 (5) During transport, the radioactive waste will be highly vulnerable to commandeering by terrorists. It will not be possible to send that many trucks and trains of waste for that many years without a security breach. Further, the necessity of guarding the waste shipments will result in the routes turning into armed camps during the time shipments are made. Since I live within two blocks of I-70 and must often cross over or under the highway, I am especially concerned about myself and my fellow citizens being delayed, interrogated, or otherwise harassed as we go about our normal business during the time the shipments take place.

5... (6) Any accidents that occur during transport have the possibility of breaching container integrity and contaminating the surroundings. ***Given the number of waste shipments that will be made, at least one accident is a statistical certainty.*** I live less than two blocks from I-70, one of the primary shipping routes, so I am one of many thousands of people who are

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5 cont. potentially in danger should an accident result in a container breach.

6 (7) Most of the routes along which the radiation will be shipped have a disproportionately high population of minority groups relative to the population as a whole. Hence, the shipments are a form of environmental racism. The Clinton administration has committed to ending environmental racism; thus the shipments are in direct violation of policy.

7 (8) The wastes will be hazardous long after our civilization has died out. No method to communicate the dangers and effective handling procedures to future civilizations has been devised. It is highly irresponsible to subject our descendents to hazards of which they know nothing, especially since it can be so easily avoided.

8 Rather than subjecting all of us, in varying degrees, to the hazards of shipping high-level nuclear wastes long distances and storing large quantities of wastes in a single location, the Department of Energy should commit itself to the following course of action designed to minimize present and future hazards.

* The Department of Energy must recognize that nuclear technology is inherently unsafe due to the unique and long-lasting hazards associated with radiation. Hence it should immediately begin taking steps to close down all nuclear power reactors over a five year period while also working with communities to increase energy efficiency over the same five year period sufficient to save all the energy that would have been produced by the power plants, making their continued operation unnecessary. This should be simple to do since we waste so much energy in the US.

* At the same time that DOE is phasing out nuclear power plants, it should begin a well-funded crash program to develop an environmentally safe way to convert high-level waste into a safe, non-radioactive form. Once the means to do this has been determined, DOE must commit to converting all high-level wastes into this non-radioactive form within ten years.

* Until the wastes are rendered non-radioactive, all waste-generating facilities must store the waste on-site, safely and securely. This minimizes hazards associated with transporting waste.

* Since nuclear weapons themselves, as well as the byproducts of their manufacture, are radioactive and therefore uniquely hazardous, DOE must push for a nuclear arms elimination treaty to be honored by every nation on the planet. Until such a treaty has been signed, DOE should begin a well-funded program to render weapons material and manufacturing byproducts non-radioactive and environmentally benign. The procedures to do this must be made available to all countries so they may safely convert their weapons and waste into non-hazardous forms.

The insanity of the Yucca Mountain proposal gives us the opportunity to admit our mistake in practicing any form of technology requiring radioactive material and commit to a non-radioactive future for ourselves and our descendents. I implore DOE to take up this challenge; I am sure you are capable of doing it.

Sincerely,

Claire L. Schosser

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