EIS001860

Iona M. Chelette, 61996 Sunburst Circle, Joshua Tree CA 92252

22 February 2000

Wendy Dixon, M/S 010
Department of Energy
OCRWM, Yucca Mountain Site
P.O. Box 30307
North Las Vegas NV 89036-0307

RECEIVED
FEB 29 2000

Proposed geologic repository for nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for holding a public hearing on the Draft EIS for this project in San Bernardino, California. Despite registering to speak, I was unable to attend and submit these written comments in lieu of that testimony.

1 Your staff, particularly Gayle Fisher and Michael Delaplane, made an extra effort to get copies of the Draft EIS to some of us at a late stage in these proceedings, and that is appreciated. I found the highly technical information in your draft accessible and understandable and the figures are laid out in a manner to encourage rather than discourage public participation. Thank you for your courtesy and your clarity.

I find the Draft EIS and the proposed project for a geologic repository at Yucca Mountain fatally flawed in the following respects:

2 **Philosophical objection to geologic repository**
We in western America are sitting on top of the greatest resource in this exponentially overpopulated world: unspoiled open land. All we have to do is not mess it up. Geologic repositories for any type of waste are inappropriate in this scenario.

3 Although an argument might be made that Yucca Mountain and its surroundings are already contaminated by proximity to the Nevada Test Site, it isn't sufficiently compelling when you consider the cultural resources which will be sacrified, environmental justice considerations and the overwhelming failure of the plan to address transportation issues comprehensively or propose adequate monitoring of the site for the active life of nuclear waste. Subsidiary but essential issues are the need to reclassify radioactive wastes for storage and the impropriety of rushing to a premature solution to our nuclear waste disposal problems.

4... **Irreplaceable cultural resources would be lost**
Seventeen and more Native American tribes' historic legal battles with the federal government over this piece of land and the fact that 150 of the 826 identified archaeological sites qualify for the National Register of Historic Places on only cursory examination should have immediately eliminated this site from

page 1 of 4 pages

...4 consideration for a geologic repository.

5 **Environmental justice/transportation considerations**
The project proposes to transport waste by rail, road or both from 77 sites all over the U.S. to Yucca Mountain yet fails to provide any information about proposed routes outside the state of Nevada. Note that the bulk of the waste is proposed to be transported from reactors on the east coast to Yucca Mountain nearest the west coast of the country.

I live in the First District of San Bernardino County in southeastern California through which a portion or all of the waste produced at the five Southwestern commercial reactor sites might be transported to Yucca Mountain. The people in my community and neighboring communities rely upon State Route 247 as one of only three access roads to our Morongo Basin. Our community groups and cities are in constant communication with the state and the county transportation departments regarding the poor condition and inadequate maintenance on SR 247 and our major thoroughfare, SR 62. We have even considered formation of assessment districts to tax ourselves to improve our roads in this area for our use.

We are a moderate to low income area dependent upon Joshua Tree National Park tourism for our economic future. Most residents have to commute at least an hour a day to work in other places. Six dumps have been proposed for within 200 miles of Joshua Tree National Park. This is an environmental injustice which sacrifices our area to the profits of the waste industry and we have organized to oppose it, including changing our political representation and encouraging our elected representatives in their now-well-known efforts to stamp out corruption in our county and prevent our desert from being used as the nation's waste repository.

If the people who will be affected by the transportation of these wastes were to be allowed to vote on the issue, they would vote no as they have voted on other proposed projects in this area.

Implementing Yucca Mountain means transporting 800,000 cubic feet of high-level radioactive waste through our desert, 80 times more waste than would have been scheduled for the Low Level Radioactive Waste site proposed for Ward Valley near Needles. Why would we put up with this if we won't put up with Ward Valley?

It would be an environmental injustice to expect the citizens of San Bernardino County's First District to bear the brunt of DOE traffic on our already inadequate roads and we should be able to expect the DOE to advise us which of our roads are being considered for alternate waste transportation routes.

6... It would be difficult to convince me that desert residents derive

Page 2 of 4 pages

6... any benefit from commercial reactors in rich Orange County, political Sacramento, or central or northern California, much less neighborhoods further East. Let those who have benefited from this technology bear the responsibility for the waste produced by it in their own backyards at their own, incidentally already contaminated, reactor sites. (See final recommendation.)

7 It would be environmental injustice to expect taxpayers to bear the burden of the 28.8 billion 1978 U.S. dollars to construct and operate the Yucca Mountain site when the waste proposed to be stored at Yucca Mountain comes from 72 commercial and only five DOE sites. These commercial entities realize profits from their activities and should be expected to pay their fair share for the cost of waste storage. If taxpayers have to bear any of this burden, they should have the opportunity to vote on whether they wish to bear the cost of construction of waste storage facilities at and transportation to Yucca Mountain.

I am less than encouraged by reports as recently as Feb. 17 that the Associated Press uncovered a leak at a Hudson River, N.Y. generator instead of DOE advising surrounding residents of this incident. The public has a right to know and judge the risk to itself if environmental justice is to be served.

8 **Inadequate monitoring is proposed for the site**
Reactor and storage sites should be monitored forever. There is no other safe and reasonable alternative. Both the preferred alternative of constructing the Yucca Mountain facility, then sealing it with passive institutional barriers in place and the no-action alternative providing for only 100 years of monitoring nuclear waste stored at current reactor sites are illogical given the known half-life of the stored materials. The EIS is insufficient because it provides for an inadequate period of monitoring the preferred alternative site after its closure.

9 The decision to use geologic disposal is 20 years old. In the last 20 years waste management experts have come to the belated realization and open admission that the environment is always degraded by dumps and that all dumps inevitably fail.

When the decision to go with geologic disposal of nuclear waste was made 20 years ago, other methods, such as transmutation and recycling, were inadequately explored before this decision was reached. The Draft EIS does not address this issue adequately.

10... The EIS is inadequate in that it does not and cannot address the effects of a nuclear megadump upon the geologic, biologic or human environment because no megadump has ever been built or operated on the scale proposed for Yucca Mountain. Megadumps are a bad idea: it just isn't logical to assume that a large accumulation of a controlled substance is going to be more easily mitigated than a smaller quality of that same dangerous

page 3 of 4 pages

...10 substance.

...8 The EIS is inadequate in that it presumes no change, no change for thousands of years. What we have learned through "good science" is that our universe as well as our environment is predicated upon constant change. Hence the need for monitoring forever.

11 **The nation's classifications for radioactive waste need to be updated and improved**
Spent canisters used for transportation should not be classified or stored as low-level radioactive waste. The proposal to do so contained in the Draft EIS lends credence to the argument that our definitions of low-level radioactive waste need to be rewritten to exclude many "below class C" items such as these.

12 Yes, please, do recycle dual-purpose canisters. That's the least we can do.

6... **Let's do it right and be proud of ourselves in future**
Just because something is feasible or expedient doesn't mean that it is the best solution to the problem or the right thing to do.

Let's leave all the nuclear waste where it is, on the sites where it is created, in dry storage, safely encased in manageable amounts, in concrete, carefully and continuously monitored and - above all - above ground, until we have improved our waste disposal technology. There is no need to rush into the solution. We can take our time with this decision. Legislation is more easily reversed than damage to our environment. Don't forget what is finite and eternal and what is merely a human construction.

I really believe that old environmentalists like myself are like the Dutchman holding his finger in the dike until this next generation of Americans, already demonstrably consumed with concern for the planet they inhabit, comes of age.

...6 Let's leave a legacy of intelligent foresight and careful consideration of consequences that we, and they, can be proud of: go for the no-action alternative, monitoring our sites forever, while seeking better solutions than catboxing nuclear and other wastes.

That's a decision we'll all be able to sleep with.

Very truly yours,

I.M. Chelette

page 4 of 4 pages