

a group of technical experts living in the SF Bay Area

EIS002293

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San Bernardino, CA 2/22/00
Exhibit 1-6

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FEB 22 2000

Comments at the DOE Feb 22 San Bernardino Meeting on Yucca Mountain

I am pleased to be here representing ACRE, Americans for Clean Responsible Energy. I am a member of the National Academy of Engineering, a past president of the American Nuclear Society, and a pioneer in the development of peaceful nuclear energy.

I can report that from the start of President Eisenhower's 1954 Atom's for Peace Program, when I joined the peaceful nuclear industry, public safety has been the key requirement and goal of the industry. Not a single member of the public has been injured by peaceful nuclear energy activities that meet US and Western standards. In a sense, the 1989 Three Mile Island (TMI) accident can be viewed as a measure of success. Despite the fuel melting and reactor damage, the safety design of the plant was such that the radiation reaching the public was less than would have been received from a two week vacation in Denver. Nature's radiation is higher in Denver than around TMI; and people in Denver live longer. Chernobyl would not have been allowed here; and the Soviets are now adopting our safety requirements

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The radiation allowed to reach the surface from the underground Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste repository is less than a tenth of that which we receive from nature; and data now indicates that such extra low level radiation, like that in Denver, may be healthy. But what about the transportation of wastes to Yucca Mountain? Considering the real transportation dangers we face from such common carriers as gasoline trucks, and the fifty thousand deaths each year from automobile accidents, why has there been such concern over nuclear waste transportation. Nuclear waste shipments are required to have such strong packaging and containment requirements that even in an accident the probability of significant radiation leakage is negligibly small. For the past 45 years, there have been some 3000 shipments of nuclear fuel wastes without any effects on the public from nuclear radiation. The normal public radiation exposures from the transportation of wastes are orders of magnitude less than our radiation exposures from nature.

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Yucca Mountain has been, and still is, being carefully studied by technical experts. The nuclear industry, and the US regulatory authorities, will not let it be operated if they find significant dangers to the public. The real nuclear energy danger is the potential future lack of nuclear energy availability. Except for nuclear energy there is no available means to significantly mitigate the global warming projections from fossil fuel use; or to meet the tripling of world energy needs in the coming decades, as the third world grows and increases its standard of living and its energy use.

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The problem the nuclear energy industry and Yucca Mountain face today results from lack of immediate need for energy expansion. In the sixties when energy use was doubling every ten years the Sierra Club was a proponent of nuclear energy. Since the Arab oil boycott of 1973 when energy prices went up and growth dropped, we have had a surplus of energy. The Sierra Club has become an opponent of nuclear energy. But it is also against coal, and oil, and gas, and dams, and geothermal power. It only advocates solar and wind power, which are not practical for the needed large future world energy expansion.

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Some day, as in the sixties, when the need for nuclear energy is recognized, the Sierra Club, and the other anti-nuclear "environmental" organizations will become nuclear energy proponents. But we can't wait for them. We should be moving to get Yucca Mountain built and operating, and revive nuclear energy in the US for the welfare of our children and grandchildren.

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