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"Weinberg, Jessica Lillian" <j-weinberg@onu.edu> on 09/18/2001  
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To: yMP\_SR@ymp.gov  
cc: lisa\_gue@citizen.org, cmep@citizen.org, Rep.Kaptur@mail.house.gov

SEP 18 2001

Subject: the Yucca project is a bad idea

Part of Records Package / Supplement / Correction

Dear Ms. Hanlon:

Pursuant to the Department of Energy's announced intention of accepting public comment on the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste storage project through September 20, 2001, I am writing to urge you to abandon the project, as it poses unnecessary threats to the environment and to public safety.

To begin with, the aquifer that lies beneath the proposed site is the only source of drinking water for a nearby community, and this aquifer would almost certainly be contaminated because seismic activity in the area would cause leakage of the nuclear waste. Because agricultural communities in the area sell their meat and produce outside the state, effects of the groundwater contamination on public health could be far-reaching. The site's ability to contain the waste without exposing nearby residents to the dangers of radiation exposure is questionable at best. The Western Shoshone Nation claims rights to this land under the Ruby Valley Treaty of 1863, and the disregard for their opposition to the project is an example of how minority and poor communities tend to be disproportionately exposed to environmentally related risks.

It is not, however, only residents of Nevada who will be at risk if the Yucca Mountain project is approved. The Department of Energy's proposed transportation scenario, which would involve the shipment by train or truck of some 70,000 metric tons of nuclear waste, poses a threat to a majority of Americans. The DOE's own statements indicate that radioactive nuclear waste would pass within half a mile of the homes, businesses, and schools of 50 million Americans in 43 states. Questions remain about the durability of the casks being proposed for shipment. They have been subjected to computer-module testing, rather than full physical testing that represents real-life scenarios. A nuclear accident could contaminate a 42-square mile area for a year or more, and most communities do not have the proper equipment and personnel to deal with a nuclear accident or incident. Even when no accidents occur, however, people living along the route will be exposed to low levels of radiation, and property values are likely to decline.

Moreover, I am disappointed in the DOE's handling of the evaluation process for this project. The DOE has repeatedly failed to make key information, including exact proposed transportation routes, public, even though most government documents are considered public property under the Freedom of Information Act of 1974. The DOE's decision to move ahead with its consideration of Yucca even though key regulations have not been finalized and the required environmental impact statement has not been released smacks of a strong bias in favor of the nuclear industry on the Department's part. The consumer group Public Citizen is suing the Environmental Protection Agency, claiming that the drinking water standards for the Yucca project are artificially weak and also convey a pro-industry bias. This is yet another issue that should be resolved before the DOE takes steps to recommend Yucca as a waste storage site.

Finally, the DOE appears to be doing everything possible to minimize public input into this project. Las Vegas residents had only nine business days

notice of a critical public hearing, and when the hearing's location was changed, public notices listed an incorrect new address. Citizens opposed to the project were denied opportunity to speak at the hearing on the grounds that they had not registered in advance. Yet those who favored the projects going forward new to register in advance. These tactics undermine the democratic process but they also undermine the DOE's credibility and raise the following question: If Yucca Mountain is a nuclear-waste storage solution beneficial to the public, why is the DOE trying to keep it from the public's eyes and ears? How can the public have confidence in a plan formulated in such a clandestine manner?

In light of the lack of sound, scientific evidence showing that Yucca is a safe disposal site for nuclear waste and that such waste can be gotten there safely, I hope that the DOE will ultimately come through for the public and the environment by recommending that Yucca Mountain be kept waste-free.

Thank you for reading my comments. I look forward to your response, as my message meets the public comment period's deadline.

Sincerely,

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