

2 Acoma Lane
Los Alamos, NM 87544
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Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Abraham:

I ask you to approve the Yucca Mountain Site for the storage of spent fuel from our nation's light water reactors. A large number of scientific, engineering, economic, and political reasons are truly overwhelming in favor of such approval. I will list a few of these with some informational comments.

1. The Federal Government has promised by law to assume care of this spent fuel and has taxed the public through the industry to pay for this service. To this date, the government has failed in its promise.
2. Spent fuel taken from a reactor is first stored in large and deep pools of water designed for the purposes of heat removal and radiation protection. The fuel in this storage presents no health hazard to the public (or utility workers).
3. Because these fuel storage pools have been filling to capacity, the several utilities are storing their oldest spent fuel in dry storage casks constructed with steel and concrete to provide radiation and accident protection. By this time, air cooling is adequate to remove the heat. These casks have been tested repeatedly for survival, assuming an accident. Success has been the consequence of every test.
4. Stored in this manner the spent fuel is safe. No hazard whatsoever is presented to the public or workers. This storage plan is adequate, but does not satisfy the law of the land. Storing spent fuel is not the business of the utilities and their space is limited.
5. The spent fuel must be accepted by the Department of Energy and shipped to a dry, safe storage area until final burial in the Yucca Mountain can be accomplished. Shipping by rail or truck has been, is, and will be safe.
6. I suggest that the Nevada Test Site is an excellent place for such dry storage. Storage on the property of an Indian tribe's property in Utah would be equally safe. Storage in an empty area (to not offend residents a few miles away) in any one of the southwestern states would be equally safe. I presume to point out that such a dry, above ground storage is not difficult, or expensive. All that is truly needed is a reinforced concrete pad, a fence, a guard station, some lights, and access by rail or truck. Cranes for lifting and moving casks is obviously necessary. I see no difficult problems.
7. Final burial must be arranged, but there is no hurry if a temporary fuel storage area is available. Approval of the burial plan is important and should be done in a timely manner. There is no real question about safety of the Yucca Mountain Site. The storage will be safe.

8. Finally, I respectfully note that many more nuclear electric power stations are needed in the United States both to replace aging coal fired plants and to increase our total power. The lack of a "solution" to the spent fuel problem is the last refuge of those opposed to nuclear energy. If this objection (truly a red herring) is removed, new orders for nuclear power plants should be forthcoming.

Finally, I feel compelled to point out what is obvious but not often recognized. Our nuclear power stations are the nation's only source of heat and electricity that does not emit CO₂, SO₂, nitrous oxides, fine coal dust, and metals such as mercury. They are reliable day and night, winter and summer, on both calm and windy days, through drought and flood. Costs of fuel have been and are expected to remain constant in price. This industry is arguably our safest source of power. I further believe that because this spent fuel is a valuable energy resource, the Department of Energy should expend more of its funds on the matter of fuel reprocessing so make this material available when it is needed in future years. A concurrent project should be to develop schemes that would make the plutonium useless as a bomb material, but still valuable for fuel for our reactors.

Sincerely,

William R Stratton

William R. Stratton

My background for a half century has been in the nuclear energy business. In the 1950's I was a member of a nuclear explosion design group at Los Alamos. From this activity I became active in criticality physics, nuclear propulsion reactors, and served for nine years on the AEC's, Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards. In 1979 I worked successfully with the President's Commission on the Accident at Three Mile Island. After retirement from Los Alamos in 1982 I worked for a better understanding of postulated "severe" accidents and for improvements in the NRC's safety rules and regulations. I have received the American Nuclear Society's Special Award twice and recently (last March) I was given the Society's Walter H. Zinn award.