



NTS Environmental Impact Statement

Introduction

In order to safely carry out its mission, the Nevada Test Site (NTS) is governed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions.

During the NEPA process, federal agencies are sometimes required to prepare a detailed statement known as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to formally evaluate the environmental impacts of a proposed action. It informs decision-makers and the public of the reasonable alternatives that would avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the environment.

Background

In 1996, the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Nevada Test Site and Off-Site Locations in the State of Nevada* (NTS EIS) was issued in accordance with NEPA. This document evaluated impacts from four possible alternatives for managing DOE activities at the NTS, and its offsite locations. The four alternatives presented in the *NTS EIS* were:

- No Action (Alternative 1) – continue to operate at the level maintained for the previous five years. A ‘No Action’ alternative is a required option under NEPA.
- Discontinue Operations (Alternative 2) – discontinue operations and interagency programs and close the NTS
- Expanded Use (Alternative 3) – maximize use of the NTS and its resources to support defense and non-defense programs
- Alternate Use of Withdrawn Lands (Alternative 4) – discontinue all defense related activities at the NTS, continue waste management and environmental restoration efforts, expand non-defense research, and establish public education and recreation uses at the NTS

The *NTS EIS* analyzed potential impacts to land use (including air space), geology and soils, air quality, water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, visual resources, socioeconomics, and human health. The DOE also analyzed the potential impacts of facility accidents and the transportation of radioactive and hazardous materials.

Record of Decision

Once an EIS is completed one of the alternatives, or a combination thereof, presented within the EIS is officially chosen. This is documented through a Record of Decision (ROD). A ROD provides a concise public record of DOE’s decision on a proposed action for which an EIS was prepared. The ROD also includes whether all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted, and if not, why they were not.

NEPA Glossary

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) insures that the policies and goals defined in NEPA are infused into the ongoing programs and actions of the Federal Government. It discusses significant environmental impacts and provides reasonable alternatives which would avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the human environment.

Supplement Analysis is a DOE document used to determine whether a supplemental EIS should be prepared pursuant to 40 CFR 1502.9(c), or to support a decision to prepare a new EIS. An SA is prepared when there are substantial changes to a proposed action for which an EA or EIS already exists, or significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.

Categorical Exclusion (CE) is a category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. For CE actions, neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required.

Environmental Assessment (EA) is a concise public document that serves to briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact. An EA must include discussion about the need for a proposed action, alternatives to the proposed action, environmental impacts and alternatives, and a list of agencies/personnel consulted.

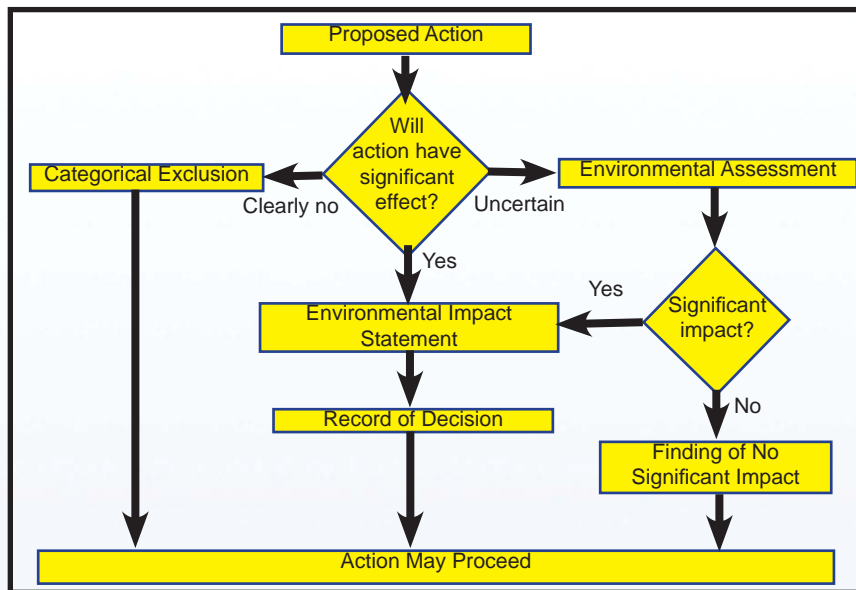
Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is a document by a Federal agency briefly presenting the reasons why a proposed action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and for which an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Site-Wide NEPA Document is a broad scope EIS or EA that is programmatic in nature and identifies and assesses the individual and cumulative impacts of ongoing and reasonably foreseeable future actions at a DOE site.

Nevada Test Site



In the test site ROD, the DOE chose to implement a combination of three alternatives: Expanded Use; No Action; and Alternate Use of Withdrawn Lands. Most activities are pursued at levels described by the Expanded Use alternative. This decision results in the continuation of the multipurpose, multi-program use of the NTS, under which DOE will pursue interagency, private industry, and public-education uses while meeting its mission requirements at the NTS and other Nevada sites.



General NEPA process

Supplement Analysis

DOE requires its site-wide environmental statements, such as the *NTS EIS*, be evaluated at least every five years to determine the need, if any, for additional NEPA analysis. This evaluation examines potential changes since the last evaluation and determines whether the existing EIS should be supplemented; whether a new EIS should be prepared; or if no further NEPA documentation is required. This evaluation is documented with a Supplemental Analysis (SA).

Additional NEPA analysis could be prompted by changes in site activities which could result in changes to environmental impacts, characteristics of the NTS or its environs, or changes in regulatory requirements or guidance.

The Process and You

The National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office (NNSA/NSO) conducts periodic evaluations of the NTS EIS. DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures require that only the completed SA and related determination be made available to the public through written requests and by placement in DOE Public Reading Rooms. NNSA/NSO has the option to make the draft SA available for public review through open-house meetings that provide the public with opportunities to discuss the document and provide comments. Comments received on the draft SA are used to develop the final SA. The final SA and determination is then made available to the public.

For more information, contact:
 U.S. Department of Energy
 National Nuclear Security Administration
 Nevada Site Office
 Office of Public Affairs
 P.O. Box 98518
 Las Vegas, NV 89193-8518
 phone: 702-295-3521
 fax: 702-295-0154
 email: nevada@nv.doe.gov
<http://www.nv.doe.gov>

DOE/NV -- 1231
 October 2007

Nevada Test Site

