

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Joe Davis 202-586-4940

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, February 14, 2002

Secretary Abraham Recommends Yucca Mountain Site To President Bush Citing “Sound Science” and “Compelling National Interests”

WASHINGTON, DC – Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham today formally recommended to President Bush that the Yucca Mountain site in Nevada be developed as the nation’s first long-term geologic repository for high-level radioactive waste, relying on more than 20 years and \$4 billion in scientific study that demonstrates Yucca Mountain is scientifically and technically suitable for development. Currently, nuclear waste is stored in temporary surface storage facilities located at 131 sites in 39 states.

In his letter to the President, Abraham said, “I have considered whether sound science supports the determination that the Yucca Mountain site is scientifically and technically suitable for the development of a repository. I am convinced that it does. The results of this extensive investigation and the external technical reviews of this body of scientific work give me confidence for the conclusion, based on sound scientific principles, that a repository at Yucca Mountain will be able to protect the health and safety of the public when evaluated against the radiological protection standards adopted by the Environmental Protection Agency and implemented by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.”

Abraham said he also considered national compelling interests in making his recommendation, but “irrespective of any other considerations, I could not and would not recommend the Yucca Mountain site without having first determined that a repository at Yucca Mountain will bring together the location, natural barriers, and design elements necessary to protect the health and safety of the public.”

There are also compelling national interests that require development of a repository including energy and national security, homeland security, nuclear nonproliferation policy, secure disposal of nuclear waste, and ongoing efforts to clean up the environment at former nuclear weapons production sites.

In addressing homeland security, Abraham said, “More than 161 million people live within 75 miles of one or more of these sites. The facilities housing these materials were intended to do so on a temporary basis. They should be able to withstand current terrorist threats, but that may not remain the case in the future. These materials would be far better secured in a deep underground repository at Yucca Mountain.”

Yucca Mountain is a geologically stable site, positioned in a closed groundwater basin, isolated on federally controlled land, housed approximately 1000 feet underground, and located farther from any metropolitan area than the great majority of less secure, temporary nuclear waste storage sites that exist today.

“After months of study based on scientific and technical research unique in its scope and depth, and after reviewing the result of a public review process that went well beyond the requirements of law, I reached the conclusions that technically and scientifically the Yucca Mountain site is fully suitable; that development of a repository serves the national interests in numerous and important ways; and that the arguments against its designation do not rise to a level that would outweigh the case for going forward. Not completing the site designation process and moving forward to licensing the development of a repository, as Congress mandated almost 20 years ago, would be an irresponsible dereliction of duty,” Abraham said.

R-02-027

- MORE -

Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA) in 1982, recognizing the overwhelming, long-held scientific consensus that the best option for high-level radioactive waste disposal would be a deep underground repository. In 1987, Congress directed the Secretary of Energy to investigate and recommend to the President whether such a repository could be located at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, after scientific study of 9 other sites resulted in Yucca Mountain being ranked the top site.

As part of the scientific investigation of Yucca Mountain, some of the world's preeminent scientists have examined every aspect of the natural process and conducted equally exhausting analysis into the benefit of adding engineered barriers to the design, that will further protect the health and safety of the public and add to the successful performance of the mountain.

Scientists have mapped and comprehensively analyzed the geological structures of Yucca Mountain and its surrounding environment, including rock units, faults, fractures, and volcanic features. They have excavated more than 200 pits and trenches to remove rocks and other material for direct observation; drilled more than 450 sampling boreholes; collected over 75,000 feet of core samples; collected and analyzed over 18,000 geologic and water samples; constructed over six and one-half miles of tunnels to provide direct access to the rocks that would be used for the repository; conducted a continuous 4-year-long test, heating some seven million cubic feet of rock over its ambient temperature; and examined over 13,000 engineered material samples to determine their performance and corrosion resistance in a variety of environments. Using this vast reservoir of information, they have followed a deliberate and cautious approach in forecasting the performance of the repository over the 10,000-year regulatory period.

Their work has been openly and thoroughly reviewed by DOE and oversight entities such as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, and the U.S. Geological Survey, as well as by scientific peer reviews conducted by other bodies, including the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Under provisions of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, Secretary Abraham is required to publicly make available statutorily-required documents that are part of his basis for the recommendation, including the Final Environmental Impact Statement. The Department's Final Environmental Impact Statement evaluates the impact of a proposed repository at Yucca Mountain, including study of transportation and potential accident scenarios analyzing potential impacts from sabotage or terrorism.

In the course of considering Yucca Mountain, the Department of Energy satisfied legal requirements for public participation by conducting more than 100 public hearings to discuss the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, siting characterization work, and other public and technical issues.

Copies of these documents are available at www.energy.gov or www.ymp.gov. In addition, the Department has made available a set of Frequently Asked Questions, providing answers to the most commonly raised public interest topics surrounding the study of Yucca Mountain and the disposition and transportation of high-level nuclear waste.

NOTE TO EDITOR: Copies of Secretary Abraham's letter to President Bush follows this release and can be found at www.energy.gov.

NOTE TO PHOTO EDITOR: A digital photo of Sec. Abraham transmitting the recommendation and supporting documents is available online at www.energy.gov

R-02-027

- DOE -