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Nevada Site Office Environmental Management

## EM NEWS FLASH

### **U.S. Department of Energy Partners With Community Advisory Board to Site Groundwater Well Locations**

As a result of more than five years of research and preparation, members of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) for Nevada Test Site (NTS) Programs met with the NTS Underground Test Area Technical Working Group (TWG) in late August 2007 to present their recommendations for additional well locations near Western Pahute Mesa. These wells, along with more than 30 existing active wells, could be used for gathering data on radioactive groundwater contamination resulting from 18 underground nuclear tests that were conducted on Western Pahute Mesa at the NTS.

Specifically, the CAB recommended installing three additional wells on and near Western Pahute Mesa, located in the northwest corner of the NTS. The CAB determined that technical and financial resources should be focused near and downgradient of Pahute Mesa based upon several risk factors derived from the need to answer their foremost question: "Will the DOE strategy reveal the location of radioactive contaminants before they show up in someone's private water well?" Indeed, the potential for contaminated water sources used by the public is the heart of the issue, and the risk factors evaluated reflect concerns such as the location of private properties, groundwater gradient, potential fast pathways for contaminate migration, and the amount of contaminants available for transport.

"The CAB's objectives are not that different than the TWG's objectives," said Randy Laczniak, a U.S. Geological Survey employee and current Chair of the TWG.

Ward Hawkins, a Los Alamos National Laboratory employee and fellow TWG member concurred, stating: "We are trying to reduce the uncertainty and, ultimately, the risk."

This unique opportunity and recommendation was offered to the volunteer board by the U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office, and is the first of its kind for Southern Nevada stakeholders. The TWG, comprised of a variety of governmental-affiliated entities including the State of Nevada and national laboratories, typically does not consult the public when determining where wells will be drilled. However, the TWG has committed to explore the CAB's recommendations and will try to incorporate the recommendation if it is found to be technically and financially feasible.

"The DOE recognizes the importance of the community having a voice in the well siting process," said Bill Wilborn, the Underground Test Area Federal Sub-Project Director. "Even though the DOE has not detected groundwater contamination off of the Nevada Test Site that resulted from historic underground nuclear testing, we understand there is a concern from the community."

This collaborative well siting approach will not stop here. Members of the CAB are also invited to be part of the TWG's future meetings to officially pinpoint the locations where up to 10 wells could be drilled between fiscal year 2009 and 2012 in Western and Central Pahute Mesa.

"We will continue to include the community through the Community Advisory Board in as many discussions as possible to ensure they are aware of and have input into our strategy for site characterization and eventual development of a groundwater monitoring system," Bill Wilborn said. **DOE/NV—1230**

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