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Two Independent Assessments Find the Department of Energy's Yucca Mountain Project is on Track

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Director of the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) today released two independent assessments addressing areas critical to the overall success of the Yucca Mountain repository program. These assessments, which include an independent review of the OCRWM Quality Assurance (QA) Program and an independent review of its engineering processes and procedures, have concluded that the Yucca Mountain Project's current QA and engineering processes and procedures are consistent with standard nuclear industry practices.

"We are pleased with the findings of both reports, and we already have begun implementing some of the recommendations," OCRWM Director Ward Sproat said. "The information and recommendations contained in the QA and engineering assessments will assist us as we move forward with our work on the repository design. This is particularly important as we prepare to submit a credible and defensible license application to the NRC next year."

These independent reviews provide information and findings that will help ensure the Yucca Mountain Project has effective quality assurance and engineering programs that meet the highest standards of the nuclear industry. Independent assessments are a standard tool used by the nuclear industry to review processes and procedures to determine where improvements can be made. The Yucca Mountain site was approved by the Congress and the President in 2002 as the location for the nation's first permanent spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste geologic repository. The Department plans to submit its license application for authorization to construct the repository to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission no later than June 30, 2008.

InfoZen Inc. conducted a comprehensive, independent review of three individual QA program plans written and implemented by OCRWM, its M&O contractor Bechtel SAIC (BSC) and its lead laboratory, Sandia National Laboratories. In the course of its review, the assessment team saw evidence of significant improvements and tangible successes in correcting historical quality related problems. InfoZen concludes that the three QA program plans are being "implemented consistent with standard nuclear industry practices and to the extent expected given the current status of the Yucca Mountain Project."

Longenecker & Associates, Inc. conducted an independent assessment of the engineering processes and procedures for OCRWM and BSC. This assessment concludes that the policies and procedures are adequate, the implementing organizations are structured appropriately for the work, and there are no

major barriers that will prevent successful completion of the engineering work. In addition, the assessment team found that personnel at all levels of the organization were knowledgeable of the procedures and committed to their effective use. Several strengths and good practices were noted by the assessment team, including proactive resolution of emergent issues, participation by construction and operations personnel during the design process, and consistency of the BSC training program with current industry best practices. This assessment also identifies opportunities for improvement, including configuration management, the streamlining of processes and procedures and other related areas.

For more information on the Yucca Mountain Project and a copy of the independent assessments visit: www.ocrwm.doe.gov.

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