

## **Site Characterization Process Irreparably Compromised, Leaked Memo from DOE Contractor**

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We are greatly disturbed by the manner in which the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is assessing the suitability of Yucca Mountain in Nevada for a high-level nuclear waste repository. A memo has come to light showing that the agency -- which is responsible for making and executing energy policy in the public interest -- is in fact going out of its way to help the nuclear industry dump its waste at the site of its choosing.

The contractor that wrote the memo, TRW, a \$17 billion company with worldwide operations, has an economic interest in moving forward the government's nuclear waste program. Rather than providing unbiased information to the government, which can then be used to make a rational decision about Yucca Mountain's suitability for waste disposal, TRW has acted as an advocate for siting a high-level waste dump at Yucca Mountain. This is inappropriate and should be investigated.

The plan to transport this highly dangerous, radioactive waste to Yucca Mountain could jeopardize the safety of millions of people, but the nuclear industry is pressing hard for it, because it represents a great deal for industry. Under the scheme, the federal government will become liable for the waste as soon as it leaves the property on which it is stored. For everyone's sake, the DOE must maintain impartiality while it studies the site to determine whether it is suitable for waste storage.

Instead, though, the agency is drawing a road map for the nuclear industry to follow in order to have the site approved. In fact, the memo outlines the basis for a recommendation by the Secretary of Energy in support of a Yucca Mountain repository. Yet the Nuclear Waste Policy Act specifies that this recommendation can be made only in consideration of scientific studies and regulatory standards that have yet to be finalized. It appears as though Yucca Mountain is quickly becoming a done deal, regardless of the fact that many steps necessary to reach the point of approval have not been taken.

This outrageous show of pro-industry bias demonstrates that the DOE's claim to impartiality is a joke. The fact that the memo was written by a DOE contractor also is highly troubling. Contractors work on behalf of the agency, but it appears that the agency is incapable of supervising them.

But this is just one example of DOE's bias. Further proof that federal agencies consider a Yucca Mountain recommendation to be a foregone conclusion lies in a proposal by Private Fuel Storage, Ltd. to open an interim waste storage facility in Utah. The proposal's draft environmental impact statement, issued by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, explicitly assumes that waste will eventually be transferred to Yucca Mountain. In protest, Public Citizen has joined environmental and public interest groups across the

country in calling for President Clinton to issue an executive order preventing the licensing of a private fuel storage facility.

Because of all the obvious problems with the storage site selection process, we call upon the government to immediately investigate DOE's actions and determine why its contractors are secretly colluding to lobby for the nuclear industry.

Pro-industry bias within the DOE and NRC seriously undermines the integrity of the Yucca Mountain site characterization and licensing processes. The public cannot be expected to have confidence in a process conducted by agencies that so obviously fail to maintain impartiality.