



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR WASTE TECHNICAL REVIEW BOARD
2300 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 1300
Arlington, VA 22201

February 13, 2007

The Honorable Samuel W. Bodman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Bodman:

The U.S. Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board held its first public meeting of 2007 on January 24 in Las Vegas, Nevada. At the meeting, senior managers from the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) presented a series of updates on the status of the Yucca Mountain repository program. The Director of OCRWM, Edward Sproat, led the presentations with an overview of his management objectives for the program. An important part of the meeting was a presentation on newly configured surface facilities that take into account the potential implementation of the transportation, aging, and disposal canister concept.

On the basis of information presented at the meeting and the Board's ongoing technical and scientific review, the Board believes that the new OCRWM leadership is moving the technical aspects of the program positively toward achieving DOE's mission of safely disposing of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste in a deep geological repository. We are encouraged by the greater responsiveness recently shown by OCRWM management to Board suggestions for ways to enhance the technical basis for DOE's repository performance estimates. The Board sees such enhancements as important in establishing a credible safety analysis and in engendering public confidence in DOE's technical work.

The Board also views sustained support of a viable science and technology (S&T) program as critical to strengthening basic knowledge associated with the safety analyses of repository design and operations. Thus, we are disappointed that DOE's fiscal year 2008 budget request for OCRWM proposes to eliminate funding for the S&T program and postpones activities carried out under the auspices of the program until FY 2009. Although the principal goals of the S&T program are long term in nature, information derived from S&T investigations already has increased confidence in the technical bases for aspects of the license application that OCRWM intends to submit in June 2008. The Board is concerned that large funding variations for the S&T program may make it difficult to attract and retain high-quality scientific and technical investigators.

The Board urges DOE to continue assigning high priority to work on the repository. We realize that DOE must consider and perhaps accommodate new options for reducing the volume of spent fuel that will require disposal. However, any such option would still require a repository for disposing of nuclear waste. Delays in progress toward achieving the goal of developing a safe repository would be counterproductive, especially now that there are strong indications that OCRWM is working toward resolving outstanding issues in a focused way.

The Board looks forward to continuing its ongoing review of DOE's technical activities related to managing and disposing of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste. We are pleased that Mr. Sproat has indicated his willingness to engage with the Board on key issues to ensure that DOE's technical basis for estimating repository performance is sound.

Sincerely,

{Signed by}

B. John Garrick
Chairman