

March 6, 2001

Mr. Budhi Sagar  
Center for Nuclear Waste  
Regulatory Analyses  
Southwest Research Institute  
6220 Culebra Rd. Bldg. 189  
San Antonio, Tx 78238-5166

SUBJECT: STUDY PROPOSAL ON ENGINEERED BARRIER SYSTEM BY THE  
INTEGRATION GROUP FOR THE SAFETY CASE (IGSC) --  
NUCLEAR ENERGY AGENCY/ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC  
CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Dear Mr. Sagar:

I have reviewed your letter of February 19, 2001, in which you seek our comments on the subject proposal and our input in determining whether the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission/Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses (NRC/CNWRA) should participate in this study. My staff has reviewed the subject proposal ("Robust Long-Term Performance of the Engineered Barrier System") by Dr. H. Umeki, a member of the IGSC. We recognize the preliminary nature of the proposal and that there could be changes to it before it becomes final. While we agree that the proposed study might be of generic importance, my staff believes that many of the tasks are more applicable to repository programs where buffer materials such as bentonite/clay would be used to backfill emplacement drifts, for example Tasks-2 and 5. Tasks 6 and 7 might be more applicable and useful to the Yucca Mountain Project (YMP).

You mention two modes of participation in this study if and when it gets finalized: (i) participate in common tasks along with all participants; and (ii) participate in focused workshops to learn from each other's experience. As you rightly conclude in your letter, the second mode, namely, participation by NRC/CNWRA staff in focused workshops on certain issues that might be directly applicable to YMP would be preferable. In summary, in my staff's opinion, a limited NRC/CNWRA participation in selected tasks might be appropriate. However, we can only make a final decision after the subject proposal takes a concrete shape and we are in a position to consider this activity in the overall context of available resources and priorities existing at the time of participation.

If you have any questions on this letter, please feel free to contact King Stablein of my staff at (301) 415-7286 or by e-mail at [nks@nrc.gov](mailto:nks@nrc.gov).

Sincerely,

/RA/

C. William Reamer, Chief  
High-Level Waste Branch  
Division of Waste Management  
Office of Nuclear Material Safety  
and Safeguards

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C. William Reamer, Chief  
High-Level Waste Branch  
Division of Waste Management  
Office of Nuclear Material Safety  
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