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MEMORANDUM FOR: The File

FROM: Catherine F. Russell  
Program Analyst, WMPI

SUBJECT: TRIP REPORT FOR WASHINGTON STATE - OCTOBER 21-22, 1982

At the invitation of Mr. Nicholas Lewis, Chairman of the State of Washington's High-Level Nuclear Waste Management Task Force, Joseph Bunting, Hubert Miller, Rob MacDougall and myself went to Washington State to attend a briefing by the Department of Energy (DOE) and their contractor Rockwell International. DOE and Rockwell were briefing the State's High-Level Nuclear Waste Management Task Force on the status of their site characterization activities for a candidate high-level waste repository to be located on the Hanford Reservation near Richland, Washington. NRC staff was invited to the briefing since we will have responsibility for reviewing the Hanford Site Characterization Report (SCR) once it is submitted to NRC by DOE, and also for assuring representation and participation by potentially affected States and Indian tribes in certain aspects of the SCR review.

The briefing began at DOE's Richland Office where Dr. Alex Fremling, Manager, DOE Richland Operations Office, and his staff gave an overview of the Hanford site, its history and the current site characterization activities taking place. Mr. Fremling emphasized that although the Hanford site is further along in the review process than any other site DOE will be characterizing, the SCR is not the licensing proceeding and DOE's activities at Hanford will not necessarily result in DOE's selection of that site for the repository. He explained that DOE must characterize at least three sites for possible licensing and, in addition to Hanford, DOE has ongoing studies of sites for possible characterization in Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, Texas and Utah. The two additional sites will be selected by May 1983. Fremling explained that at Hanford the current schedule calls for submission of the SCR to NRC by November 15, 1982, the sinking of an exploratory shaft at the site sometime in 1983, and completion of an Environmental Impact Statement by September 1987.

After completion of the briefing at DOE, we travelled to the Hanford Reservation for a briefing by Rockwell International and a tour of their Near Surface Test Facility. The presentation was done by Dr. Raul Deju, Basalt Waste Isolation Project (BWIP) Director, Rockwell Hanford Company. Dr. Deju explained that the objective of their work for DOE was two-fold: (1) to assess the feasibility of siting, constructing, and operating a high-level waste repository in the basalts underlying the Hanford site; and (2) to provide the engineering technology needed for the detailed design of a basalt repository with appropriate safeguards for long-term isolation of high-level nuclear wastes. Most of the presentation by Dr. Deju and his staff focused on the technical aspects of the site characterization work currently taking place at Hanford. We then toured the Near Surface Test Facility where Rockwell has been doing geologic, hydrologic, and engineering testing to determine the reactions and integrity of basalt under various conditions. The briefing was concluded with a bus tour of the exploratory shaft site.

NRC is currently scheduled to give a similar briefing on their activities regarding the Hanford site characterization process to Washington's High-level Nuclear Waste Management Task Force on November 15, 1982. It is expected that DOE and Rockwell officials will be invited to attend by the State of Washington.

In addition to attending the DOE/Rockwell briefings, we also attended a public hearing by the Washington State Senate Committee on Energy and Utilities. The Subcommittee on Radioactive Waste held a hearing on potential high-level waste repository siting in the State of Washington. Testimony was given by Federal officials, State officials, local government, Indians, private organizations and the general public. The NRC employees were there strictly to observe and not to participate in the hearing.

Testimony for the Federal Government was given by DOE and Rockwell regarding the status of Federal high-level waste repository siting programs and specifically the status and anticipated future actions regarding the Hanford Basalt Waste Isolation Project.

Local officials overwhelmingly testified in support of a high-level waste repository being sited in Hanford once the technology and safety issues were finalized. It would result in positive economic benefits to the area including more jobs, more business and more economic stability.

State Government officials neither supported nor prohibited the siting of the repository in Hanford. They feel more information is necessary before making a decision and emphasized that it was crucial that the State be involved in all aspects of the decision-making process for selection of a repository site. Dave Stevens of the Governor's office iterated the need for a realistic timetable by both DOE and NRC capable of being met so that both the State and Federal government will not be forced to make decisions due to milestone schedules rather than facts. He suggested that in order to assure State consultation and concurrence throughout the proceeding, the State would like to have a written understanding with DOE and NRC. Mr. Stevens also said the Governor feels very strongly about the need for the Federal Government to compensate and provide benefits to an area for the use of their natural resources for a high-level nuclear waste repository.

Mr. Nicholas Lewis, Chairman, State of Washington High-level Nuclear Waste Management Task Force, talked about the formation, by Executive Order, of the Task Force by Governor Spellman, its organization and future responsibilities. He said the Task Force was created to represent the State in coordinating with all Federal agencies on high-level radioactive waste activities. The Task Force was responsible for scheduling briefings with DOE and NRC to better understand what each agency is doing and how the State fits into the entire review and selection process.

A statement was read into the record from the Yakima Indian Tribe. They pointed out that in the Treaty of 1855, they agreed to cede much of their land to the Federal Government, including what is currently the Hanford Reservation. Their own land lies just 13 miles from Hanford and the tribe still has food gathering and mineral rights to this land. The testimony emphasized the importance of assuring that the Yakima tribe is invited to participate in all aspects of the decision-making process for the siting of a repository in Hanford. If immediate steps are not taken to achieve this, the Yakimas stated they will seek and find other, more acceptable means of representation in the proceeding. It is crucial that their unique religion and value systems be given proper respect and consideration in all proceedings regarding Hanford.

The hearing concluded with testimony from citizens and private organizations which basically reiterated the pros and cons given in earlier testimony.

151  
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