

Yucca Mountain Program Oversight Eureka County Perspective Abigail Johnson, nuclear waste advisor

Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board
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Introduction

- ▶ Personal background
- ▶ Eureka County's oversight program: transportation, emergency management, impacts to the County and the State of Nevada, full participation (DOE, NRC, EPA, etc.) public information
- ▶ *Nuclear Waste Update* newsletter
- ▶ www.yuccamountain.org

Oversight in Oversight

- ▶ Oversight should not be categorized into technical and non technical. Many major challenges have been institutional rather than technical – management, policy, and systems issues. However, those essentials have received far less attention from this board, from Congress, from other agencies, and from DOE itself.

AULG oversight influenced “technical decisions” ?

- ▶ AULG–sponsored Multi–Purpose Canister workshop/initiative 1995→→→ TAD ?
- ▶ Nye County sponsored Atmospheric Pathways seminar to bring attention to the issue
- ▶ Eureka County’s analysis of impacts of the Carlin rail route through Crescent Valley
- ▶ Carlin route land use conflicts, railroad design, regional emergency response center analysis

EIS Participation

- ▶ NEPA process was one way to review DOE's project, provide input, and involve citizens
- ▶ However, DOE did not allow any local government or the State of Nevada to be a NEPA "cooperating agency" for the DEIS, resulting in inaccurate and outdated baseline data and inadequate impact analysis
- ▶ In order for AULGs to have influence, project proponent has to be open to ideas

Oversight: Effective?

- ▶ Consistent funding on a known schedule
- ▶ Ample funding to engage and retain technical experts
- ▶ Proponent and other agency participants must be open to receiving comments and constructive criticism, an iterative process
- ▶ When AULGs collaborated on an issue or project, the results were considered more seriously
- ▶ Inconsistent, undependable funding (no funding 1996 and 1997)
- ▶ Proponent budgeted minimal AULG funding and micromanaged work plans
- ▶ DOE not open to consulting with local governments, for example in EIS preparation
- ▶ Minimized and marginalized transportation concerns of AULGs

More effective

Less effective

Oversight and confidence in the “validity of the technical process”?

- ▶ AULGs must explain complex technical information to the local public
- ▶ Better oversight = better information = better understanding which benefits all
- ▶ Direct participation in studies/drilling with DOE may increase confidence of that county, but not AULGs as a whole.

Technical process must be valid to have confidence in it

- ▶ Technical process has to be valid in order to have confidence in it. We have questioned its validity throughout our oversight involvement, and so our ability to participate in oversight has given us knowledge about the project, and has raised more questions.
- ▶ Congress enacts Screw Nevada bill in 1987: there is no site to compare Yucca Mountain to; equity is abandoned
- ▶ DOE changes its own siting guidelines in 2001 when it realizes that Yucca Mountain can't meet them

Technical process must be valid

- ▶ DOE's own studies reveal that Yucca Mountain is not what was assumed: wet not dry, young volcanoes, multiple earthquake faults, and the mountain won't contain the waste. Safety depends on special canisters and titanium drip shield carports to contain the waste.
- ▶ Take this set of facts, and instead of Nevada, substitute Vermont or Maine or Wisconsin or wherever you live. Would the government be able to continue with the project in those states? No.

What was missing?

- ▶ No room for dissent in DOE's "Getting to Yes" management style. Scientific findings that identified flaws in the site were forwarded to management for policy and public relations spin.
- ▶ Respect for Nevada and Nevadans
- ▶ Common sense

Conclusion

- ▶ Oversight has enabled local governments to participate in the process, to raise concerns and questions with decision makers, to educate the public and occasionally to be part of a constructive process.
- ▶ Oversight efforts would be more effective if DOE had been consistently supportive of funding and oversight activities.
- ▶ Local and state government oversight must be consistently and adequately funded, but not by the proponent
- ▶ AUG oversight is essential for a large controversial and technical project such as a repository