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For Immediate Release

Wednesday, July 28, 2010

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DOE Misleads Inspector General About Yucca Mountain Shutdown Problems

The Department of Energy's Inspector General (IG) has issued a report highlighting Department of Energy's (DOE) failure to conduct an orderly project shutdown of the Yucca Mountain Project. This is precisely the concern expressed by the Nuclear Waste Strategy Coalition (NWSC) in our March 4, 2010 letter sent to the IG warning about the loss of valuable information that would occur as a result of the hasty and unwarranted shutdown. The IG's report reveals that DOE misled the IG about the planned shutdown. First by informing the IG that the DOE was in the process of preparing a master plan for shutdown, which resulted in the IG's deferral of their audit of shutdown activities, and second when the DOE informed the IG that they had stopped work on the shutdown plan, even though the shutdown was proceeding at an accelerated pace. In the IG's recently issued report "*Need for Enhanced Surveillance During the Yucca Mountain Project Shut Down*," the IG concluded that the efforts taken "... did not, in our judgment, substitute for a master plan..." and that "... the Department needs to take special steps to ensure that the extraordinary documentary record of the Project be safeguarded for future use."

The DOE's actions to shut down Yucca Mountain are disappointing, but unfortunately not surprising. The termination of Yucca Mountain has been politically driven from the beginning, and we now discover that the political goal (shutdown by September 30, 2010) led the DOE to deceive its own IG and take shortcuts that will undoubtedly lead to the loss of critical information and further waste of ratepayer and taxpayer money. The DOE has spent over \$10 billion dollars of electric ratepayer's money over the past 30 years amassing an immense amount of data on Yucca Mountain and it is unconscionable that efforts are not being taken to preserve it.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission Atomic Safety and Licensing Board recently ruled that DOE's unilateral action to shut down the Yucca Mountain Project violates federal law and multiple parties are in the process of suing the DOE over the shutdown. Given the current state of affairs, rather than accelerating the shutdown of Yucca Mountain, the government should be acting carefully and deliberately to ensure that the ratepayer and taxpayer investment in Yucca Mountain is preserved while these important legal matters are resolved.

Almost as disappointing as the shutdown of Yucca Mountain is the fact that the IG's office has chosen not to pursue their audit due to the aggressive timeline the DOE has set for also shutting down the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management within the DOE. The NWSC believes that it is the IG's responsibility to pursue all avenues to ensure that the \$10 billion of scientific research, engineering work and technical data already spent is being safeguarded and managed in an efficient manner.

The NWSC is an ad hoc group of state utility regulators, state attorneys general, electric utilities and associate members representing 49 member/affiliate organizations in 32 states, committed to reforming and adequately funding the U.S. civilian high-level nuclear waste transportation, storage, and disposal program.

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