

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Office of Public Affairs  
Washington, DC 20555  
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234  
Internet:opa@nrc.gov

No. 99-253  
November 30, 1999

## NRC SCHEDULES MEETINGS IN NEVADA TO DISCUSS PERFORMANCE OF SPENT FUEL TRANSPORTATION CASKS IN ACCIDENTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has scheduled meetings December 8-9, in Henderson and Pahrump, Nevada, to seek public comments on an upcoming study of the performance of spent nuclear fuel transportation casks in accidents.

The agency would like to hear public views on those aspects of transportation safety that they believe are the most important. There will be an opportunity for discussion of testing and computer simulation of casks, the possibility of highway or railway accidents, cask performance during collisions and fires, and behavior of transported fuel in accidents.

Over the next few years, the NRC will evaluate the performance of spent fuel transportation packages. A similar study was performed in 1987 and was commonly known as the "modal study." A number of things have changed since that time:

- The number of spent fuel shipments from nuclear power plants is likely to increase if a centralized spent fuel storage facility or a high-level waste repository, such as the one proposed at Yucca Mountain, begins operating;
- The industry is developing new spent fuel transportation cask designs;
- Sophisticated computer analytical tools have been developed which can now assess accident scenarios and consequences in great detail;
- Accident statistics have changed since the first study was done in the mid 1980's.

Previous NRC studies to assess the robustness of the casks relied on professional judgment and computer analyses, but no actual physical testing. For this upcoming study, testing is an option, and the agency would like to have public views as to the need, importance or types of physical tests they believe should be performed.

Historically, spent fuel shipments in NRC certified casks have an excellent safety record -- approximately 1300 spent fuel shipments have been made since 1971, with no radiological releases to the environment from accidents.

Spent nuclear fuel is transported by truck or rail in heavy metal casks. NRC requires that the cask designs withstand a sequential series of tests to ensure their ability to withstand a range of accidents. They are evaluated for a 30-foot drop onto an unyielding surface, a drop onto a vertical steel bar, a fully engulfing 30-minute fire, and finally, immersion in water.

The meeting on December 8 will be held at the Henderson Convention Center, at 200 Water Street, from 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. An evening seminar will also be held from 7:00 until 9:30 p.m. The daytime session will meet in a roundtable format with participants from citizen and environmental groups, nuclear industry, state, tribal and local governments, and academia. The evening seminar will be held in a "town hall" format to discuss NRC's role in ensuring transportation safety, and to hear views from interested members of the public.

A similar meeting was held earlier this month in Bethesda, Maryland.

An additional seminar on December 9 in Pahrump, will be held at the Mountain View Casino and Bowl, at 1750 Pahrump Valley Road, from 10:00 a.m. until noon, and will also adopt a "town hall" format.

All of the meetings are open to the public.

Copies of the original modal study, entitled "Shipping Container Response to Severe Highway and Railway Accident Conditions," (NUREG/CR-4829), and a brochure entitled "Transporting Spent Fuel" (NUREG/BR-0111), which describes the results and conclusions of the modal study, are available from the Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 37082, Washington, D.C., 20402-9328; telephone 202-512-1800.

Those wishing to obtain other background material and a detailed meeting agenda, can do so on the internet, at <http://ttd.sandia.gov/nrc/modal.htm>

###