



## **President Bush Makes Historic, But Wrong, Choice on Nuclear Waste**

For immediate release

### **PRESS RELEASE**

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**Decision to designate Yucca Mountain as world's first nuclear waste repository will not increase security and may threaten crucial water resources**

**Independent Scientific Institute Says Decision Based on Politics, Not Sound Science**

*Takoma Park, Maryland., Feb. 15, 2002:* U.S. President George W. Bush made an unprecedented, high-stakes decision today, designating Yucca Mountain in Nevada as the country's official repository for highly radioactive nuclear waste. Unfortunately, for a host of reasons, it is the wrong choice.

"Yucca Mountain is not a suitable site for a nuclear waste repository," said Dr. Arjun Makhijani, president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER), in Takoma Park, Maryland. "The site is crisscrossed with geologic faults; official computer models used to assess site suitability are riddled with uncertainties; and federal regulations have been changed or set aside several times to accommodate it, thus abandoning protections for drinking water. President Bush should reverse his decision."

The President's decision, if it withstands congressional veto, would open the figurative floodgates for Yucca Mountain to accept a total of 77,000 tons of highly radioactive waste, most of it spent fuel from nuclear power plants. The spent fuel, which will remain dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years, is now stored at dozens of power plant sites around the country, generally in huge, swimming-pool-like concrete tanks. More than 40,000 tons of it, containing hundreds of tons of [plutonium](#), the stuff from which nuclear weapons are made, have accumulated so far.

"The Bush administration's claim that Yucca Mountain will improve 'homeland security' is disingenuous and simply incorrect," Dr. Makhijani explained. "On the one hand, the Administration says it wants to advance the goal of securing spent fuel against terrorist attacks by consolidating it all at one site. On the other hand, it is encouraging the re-licensing of existing power plants far beyond their current licenses, thus ensuring that dozens of sites will continue to operate with spent fuel pools."

IEER notes that the site's history carries the whiff of politics rather than sound science. "Sites in New England were abruptly removed from the selection process, mandated by the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act, only a few months after they were put on the list in early 1986," Dr. Makhijani recalled. "The cut happened just a couple of weeks after concerned New England residents went to see a top aide to then-Vice President Bush, who was preparing to launch his presidential campaign. The next year Congress named Yucca Mountain as the only site to be investigated."



IEER has offered up an alternative approach. “To reduce the risk of large-scale catastrophe in case of a terrorist attack,” explained Dr. Makhijani, “the spent fuel should be put in on-site or close-to-site subsurface dry storage casks,” like the type of structures built for the storage of the vitrified high-level wastes at the Dept. of Energy’s Savannah River Site in South Carolina. “The federal government should use monies from the Nuclear Waste Fund to pay for additional on-site storage necessitated by delays in the repository program.”

“For the long term,” Dr. Makhijani continued, “no reasonable substitute for a deep geologic repository exists. But more basic research on various geologic settings is needed before sites can be scientifically screened.”

“It is possible to do a far better job,” explained Dr. Makhijani, “but the Energy Department seems incapable of it. For instance, it has essentially ignored an excellent 1983 study that it commissioned from the National Academy of Sciences.”

Dr. Makhijani concluded: “President Bush should reverse his decision and declare both Yucca Mountain and the Energy Department unsuitable for the job. He should create a blue-ribbon commission to recommend a new program to him. That approach stands a far better chance of actually restoring some confidence in public science and leading to a sound geologic repository program, which is needed for both security and environmental reasons.”

The Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER) is a nonpartisan, independent, nonprofit organization with expertise on nuclear waste issues. IEER has published studies and articles on Yucca Mountain and radioactive waste management, most of which can be found on its web site, .