REBUTTALS TO CHICAGO TRIBUNE
2/7/00 EDITORIAL ON YUCCA MT.

NEIS has prepared this point-by-point rebuttal to the Chicago Tribune in response to its editorial, MISPLACED FEARS ABOUT NUCLEAR WASTE, February 7, 2000. Feel free to contact NEIS for more information on this, or other nuclear power related issues.

**The Tribune wrote:**

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<td>“Thirteen years after Yucca Mountain was chosen as the best site for an underground repository,...”</td>
<td>Yucca Mt. was not chosen as the “best” site for anything. It was selected by Congress in 1987 as the “only” site, regardless of its actual capability to safely or successfully accomplish its mission of keeping radionuclides out of the environment for at least 10,000 years. DOE was ordered to “characterize” only Yucca Mt., and no other site. Five other sites were previously removed from consideration, largely for political reasons. By this standard, had Tribune Tower been selected, it would also be the “best” site to hold HLRW.</td>
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<td>“Congress... still dallies over final approval, fearful of offending western politicians afflicted with not-in-my-back-yard (NIMBY) syndrome.”</td>
<td>The writer conveniently overlooks two massive logs in his eyes. First, the delegates to Congress from Nevada are sworn to protect the people of Nevada in the Congress; they are doing their job. Second, NIMBY is clearly a double-edged sword. They may not want it in their backyard in Nevada; but BY LAW (unless it changes in the recent S.1287 vote) interim storage for and ownership of the spent-fuel was the responsibility of the nuclear utilities. They are the NIMBY’s, since they don’t want the obligation of handling their wastes. The recent DOE court ruling has passed the title of these long-lived wastes to DOE -- i.e., us, the U.S. taxpayers. The waste is now all of ours.</td>
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<td>“Some $7 billion in utility company (billpayer) funds has been spent on preliminary engineering and environmental studies, yet it will be another 10 years, at the earliest, before the underground facility is ready.”</td>
<td>So what? If the site is unacceptable, waste shouldn’t be moved even if we have $100 billion saved up. This is not the first project in human history to be delayed. At least the delays are in the best health and safety interests of the public and the environment, and not some well-connected fat cats building tollways. DOE has worked out arrangements with utilities, as per the court order, to manage the waste safely at reactor sites, until such time as a permanent disposal facility is ready. Would the Tribune be as eager to send 36,300 shipments of Ebola virus through Illinois to some hospital or CDC facility that hadn’t yet been constructed, just so we could honor a deadline or a contract?</td>
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**The Tribune wrote:**

"Meanwhile, some 40,000 tons of spent fuel--5,260 tons of it here in Illinois--rest in heavy-water tanks adjacent to the nuclear plants where they were used. Some out-of-state utilities have run out of tank space and are using less-desirable "dry" encasements. The oldest of ComEd’s plants will reach that point next year."

**NEIS replies:**

Again, so what? The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has twice stated that the spent fuel is safe at reactor sites for as much as 100 years; utilities themselves have for years been touting the safety of these pools to assuage public concerns. Has something changed about their safety capability to protect the public that we weren’t told about, requiring us to “fast-track” moving the wastes?

The “dry’ encasements” -- or “dry-casks” as they are really called -- were designs fought for strenuously by the utilities. What makes them less-desirable? The author doesn’t say.

Whether in wet pools or “dry-casks,” the wastes at reactor sites have the benefit of having constant monitoring, engineered barriers, trained response personnel and equipment onsite, and, for the most part no external threats to be concerned with. The 36,300 shipments of spent-fuel prematurely slated to go through Illinois -- 5 per day, every day, for 24 years on average, according to DOE at the hearing in Chicago Feb. 1st -- will have none of these advantages, or at greatly reduced levels at best, even with the promised escorts. If moved, however, they will have to contend with every transportation downside our society perpetuates -- everything from bad weather, bad roads, and traffic jams, to drivers who got their licenses from the CDL scandal.

"The Energy Department's proposed transport plan, for all the wild-eyed rhetoric thrown at it, appears more than reasonable. The fuel assemblies would travel inside unbreakable leaden casks lined with two thick layers of stainless steel."

**The Tribune wrote:**

"It is imperative, therefore, that Yucca Mountain be fast-tracked..."

**NEIS replies:**

DOE has never said these casks are “unbreakable.” In fact, even in those dramatic but improperly used films showing casks getting rammed, burned, and dropped, the casks did break open twice. They did not withstand the military projectile of 20 years ago.

It is highly doubtful that the “two thick layers of stainless steel” in today’s casks are a match for the kinds of military ordinance available to determined terrorists with shoulder-held weapons; or depleted uranium ordinance used in the Gulf War and Yugoslavia/Serbia.

Even in the 20-year-old films, the cask in the fire DID rupture after 100 minutes, in two places, squirting molten lead out the cracks. The lead is supposed to protect people from the radiation; if it’s squirting out, there is less shielding for emergency responders at the site. There are many questions deserving further tests regarding the safety of shipping casks. Using a portion of the 100 year safety window the NRC says exists to do these tests and come up with better casks is the prudent thing to do.

On what rational basis? There is no storage crisis. Federal officials attest to the safety of keeping wastes actively monitored onsite. Many transportation uncertainties need to be resolved,
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<td>and the money procured to resolve them.</td>
<td>And the site itself has not been determined to be acceptable. That's what science -- not editorial writers -- are supposed to determine. And recent science has not been producing favorable results for the Yucca Mt. site. Worse still, every geological or hydrological setback has been met by regulators with moves to relax standards and specifications meant to protect worker and public safety.</td>
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<td>This is not science. To adequately protect the public and the environment, it is the facility that must meet the standards; not the standards that get modified to meet the flaws found at the facility. This turns both science and tort law on its head, with no rational basis for doing so.</td>
<td>And the site itself has not been determined to be acceptable. That's what science -- not editorial writers -- are supposed to determine. And recent science has not been producing favorable results for the Yucca Mt. site. Worse still, every geological or hydrological setback has been met by regulators with moves to relax standards and specifications meant to protect worker and public safety.</td>
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“Specially equipped trains and semi-trailers would follow designated routes, monitored all the way by electronics and escorted through urban areas by armed guards.”

And in Illinois, the Illinois Dept. of Nuclear Safety -- the only state-level one in the country -- has to its great credit testified it will provide escort services in Illinois. What has not been made clear is where the money will come from to pay for the as many as seven separate federal, state, and local agencies involved in such shipments. IDNS intends to bill for these services, but it has not been clearly laid out in law if the money comes from the Nuclear Waste Trust Fund, or from the ratepayers whose waste is coming through. Until this issue of payment is explicitly resolved, without court challenges, this escort expense could well become yet another hidden tax or nuclear power subsidy that people will not be informed about. And 36,300 shipments at $2,500 per shipment (the IDNS figure used, ONLY for IDNS services) is $90,750,000.

“The writer clearly shows his ignorance of radiation exposure, and the implications of transportation of spent-fuel on this scale. DOE reported at the Chicago hearing that if a person were caught in traffic next to a shipping cask for 40-60 minutes (if you’ve ever been on I-80 or I-294, you KNOW this is not an unreasonable possibility), s/he could receive the dose equivalent of one chest x-ray. |

Since sensitive populations will be affected worse, or at lower doses (children, pregnant women and fetuses, immune deficient people), this is not insignificant. And if they travel those same roads daily for 24 years as the 36,300 projected shipments will, the cumulative doses could easily exceed DOE predictions. Finally, radiation dose damage is cumulative, so whether the actual amount of a single exposure is “less than most ...people encounter in their daily travels...” -- whatever that means, since it's undefined here -- is totally irrelevant, and adding to that exposure burden can be harmful.

“The Tribune wrote: | NEIS replies: |
| “It's also true that shipments will emit trace levels of radiation as they pass by, though less than most people encounter in their everyday travels.” | The writer clearly shows his ignorance of radiation exposure, and the implications of transportation of spent-fuel on this scale. DOE reported at the Chicago hearing that if a person were caught in traffic next to a shipping cask for 40-60 minutes (if you’ve ever been on I-80 or I-294, you KNOW this is not an unreasonable possibility), s/he could receive the dose equivalent of one chest x-ray. |

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“The only real danger here is that anti-nuke scare tactics will cause more delays and bigger piles of nuclear waste. Right here, in our own backyard.” If the writer is really concerned about these “bigger piles of nuclear waste...Right here, in our own backyard,” he should do one of two things: 1.) work with us to shut down nuclear power plants, since, as long as they operate, the piles will only get bigger; and 2.) recognize what a “NIMBY” he is for saying we should get it out of our backyard, since we Illinoisans made the harmful substances. It’s the hallmark of the NIMBY to say it’s okay to harm others, just so we can get it out of our backyard.

“...historically the anti-nukes have had useful things to say. They were essentially right decades ago when they predicted that fail-safe nuclear power would become too expensive to compete with other forms of energy production. Had they made their case with cool facts, instead of hot, doomsday rhetoric, northern Illinois might have been spared the albatross that is Commonwealth Edison’s multibillion-dollar fleet of nuclear reactors.” A very strange comment, coming from an editorial board that rarely if ever spoke out against ComEd rate hikes or nuclear plant construction when they had the chance to. We did not understand that the “anti-nukes” had the ability to dictate Tribune editorial policy in the past, or we would have used that power.

“anti-nuclear crusaders,” “penchant for hyperbole,” “...stoking public anxiety...about spent reactor fuel” “hot, doomsday rhetoric,” “unreasoned fear of nuclear power,” “NIMBY -- ‘not-in-my-backyard’ syndrome,” “wild-eyed rhetoric” and “anti-nuke scare tactics,” etc. Can we assume these are some of the “cool facts” that anti-nuke crusaders forgot to use previously? Or are they just the “wild-eyed rhetoric” of an over zealous editorial board writer?

Our lawyers inform us that, unfortunately, these rantings are fully protected by the Tribune’s First Amendment Rights to state their editorial opinions. We had hoped that they at least represented slander that could result in actual damages, either to us, or society as a whole; unfortunately not. We even asked the lawyers if, while not exactly adding up to shouting “Fire!” in a crowded theater (NOT protected by the First Amendment), they at least amounted to yelling “Sit down!” on a smoldering sofa. Again the lawyers said “no.” Proves again what Noam Chomsky said -- that the “freedom of the press only exists if you own one.” At some point, in some way, in the future, the Tribune can, will, and must be held accountable for these words.