

From the Director

I have been impressed, since I became Director of the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) in December 1999, with the quality of the Program's work and the dedication of its people. Most of the work discussed in this report was completed before I took the helm, including several major actions that brought us closer to meeting the Nation's spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste management goals.

One important milestone was the issuance of the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal of Spent Nuclear Fuel and High-Level Radioactive Waste at Yucca Mountain, Nye County, Nevada*. The draft environmental impact statement provides the background, data, and analyses that can help decision-makers and the public understand the potential environmental impacts of constructing, operating and monitoring, and eventually closing a repository at Yucca Mountain. Following the release of the document, we embarked upon a series of public hearings and provided an extended period for public comment. We will carefully assess the comments made during this process and will respond to them in the final environmental impact statement.

We have continued the scientific and technical work required to reduce uncertainties so that an informed, science-based decision will be made on Yucca Mountain. As some testing and analysis activities reached completion, we prepared technical documentation of our findings. This documentation will support the Secretary of Energy's decision on whether to recommend to the President that the site be approved for development as a repository.

The regulatory framework for evaluating the suitability of the Yucca Mountain site moved closer to final form. In November 1999, the Department published a proposed revision to its repository siting guidelines, reflecting a shift away from a generic approach that could apply to any site and toward a site-specific approach involving risk-informed, performance-based objectives. In Fiscal Year 1999, this same site-specific approach was taken by both the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in their proposed Yucca Mountain repository licensing regulations and Yucca Mountain radiological protection standards, respectively. The Department's siting guidelines base a site suitability determination on the Secretary's assessment of the site's likely ability to meet the applicable NRC and EPA regulations.

Over the past year, we have also continued to refine our design concept and to develop the conditions to be placed on its implementation. The enhanced repository design enables us to demonstrate better the expected performance of a repository at the Yucca Mountain site, while balancing such significant factors as long-term public safety, inter- and intra-generational equity, worker safety, and cost. The design provides flexibility to allow for changes based on new data or an evolution in national policy in the future.

These activities, with corresponding progress in other important areas, have kept the Program on track to complete the site characterization phase of our work. We are looking toward a decision in 2001 on whether to recommend the Yucca Mountain site to the President and then to the Congress. Our objectives are to provide the information necessary to support this process and to communicate our findings effectively to our stakeholders. A site recommendation would have to be supported by reasonable scientific assurance that a repository at Yucca Mountain will adequately protect public health and safety and the environment for thousands of years into the future.

The Civilian Radioactive Waste Management Program is on a sound course. The Administration continues to believe that the overriding goal of the Federal Government's high-level radioactive waste management policy should be the establishment of a permanent geologic repository. OCRWM is in the process of completing the scientific and technical work leading up to the national decisions supporting this goal.



Ivan Itkin, Director
Office of Civilian Radioactive
Waste Management