



Q: *Why is the DOE studying only Yucca Mountain?*

A: In 1987 Congress directed the DOE to study only Yucca Mountain after it was consistently ranked as the site that possessed the best technical and scientific characteristics to serve as a repository.

Some suggest that the site was picked on the basis of “politics” in that the State of Nevada is represented in Congress by a relatively small congressional delegation, and is outnumbered by other states. The fact is that years of scientific study, culminating in a 1986 comparison and ranking of the nine sites then under consideration for characterization, led the DOE to conclude that Yucca Mountain ranked at the top of all sites studied. The DOE also examined a number of ways of combining the components of the ranking scheme; this only confirmed the conclusion that Yucca Mountain came out in first place.

Shortly thereafter, in 1987, Congress directed the DOE to concentrate **only** on Yucca Mountain. As noted, at the time of the 1987 congressional decision, scientists had already collected much information about Yucca Mountain from field and laboratory studies. Additionally, the U.S. Geological Survey and national laboratories had already been studying the area’s geology and hydrology since the start of atomic testing; beginning in January 1951 over 800 U.S. nuclear weapon tests have been conducted at the Nevada Test Site, in support of the weapons program.

In-depth follow-up studies have confirmed that Yucca Mountain has many positive attributes that would contribute to safe geologic disposal, including the site’s remoteness, arid climate, multiple natural barriers, great depth to water table, and an isolated hydrologic basin. Yucca Mountain is located in a desert, isolated from population, in a region where the land is controlled by the federal government, including the U.S. military. Most of the land in this

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region is under federally restricted access. In contrast, all major nuclear power generation facilities in the United States are located near large metropolitan centers, in order to reduce the amount of power that is lost during transmission. In fact, most metropolitan centers — and more than 161 million Americans — reside within 75 miles of a major nuclear facility (commercial, and/or defense). Yucca Mountain would truly be one of the few nuclear facilities to be located in a remote setting, more than 90 miles from the nearest population center.

Additionally, Yucca Mountain would not be the first repository for radioactive waste to be developed by the DOE. After more than 20 years of scientific study, the Environmental Protection Agency certified the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico. WIPP began receiving a specific class of defense-generated waste on March 26, 1999. However, the high-level waste and spent nuclear fuel contemplated for disposal at Yucca Mountain cannot, by law, be stored in WIPP.