

## *From the Director*

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In Fiscal Year 1998, the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) completed the *Viability Assessment of a Repository at Yucca Mountain*. It provides Congress, the President, and the public with information on the progress of the Yucca Mountain Site Characterization Project. The assessment is based on 15 years of scientific investigations, engineering and design, and performance assessment analyses.

Based on the results of the viability assessment, the Department of Energy believes that work at the site should proceed. However, this does not constitute a decision that the site is suitable for a repository. Rather, the viability assessment identifies key issues that must be resolved before the Secretary can determine whether to recommend the site for development, and it lays out a detailed plan and cost estimate for future work.

As we had intended when we announced our plans for the assessment in 1996, undertaking it demanded a comprehensive evaluation of what had been learned, and what remains to be learned, about the Yucca Mountain site and repository design. The task thus served as a valuable management tool for further integrating our efforts. As planned, we headed into Fiscal Year 1999 with a site characterization project that is focused on the work ahead.

In the upcoming year, we will be preparing the comprehensive technical documentation needed to complete the site characterization of Yucca Mountain and to support the Secretary of Energy's decision in 2001 on whether to recommend to the President that the site be approved for repository development. 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. Determining whether that assurance can be demonstrated and, if so, how it is best demonstrated, is the challenge we are now addressing.

In making a decision on site recommendation, the Secretary will weigh the results of our work, including a comprehensive environmental impact statement. If the Secretary recommends the site to the President, the President must decide whether to recommend it to Congress. If a recommendation is accepted by the Congress, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will have to decide, in a long and complex licensing proceeding, whether to authorize construction and operation of a repository designed for the Yucca Mountain site.

Meanwhile, I am encouraged by the work done by our scientists in preparing the viability assessment, as well as by the interest that this important national matter has received this year.



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