

# **WORKING TO BUILD TRUST IN NUCLEAR WASTE REGULATION: Progress in Public Outreach**



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# Overview

- Introduction
- Involving the Public in Rulemaking
- Need for a New Approach
- Revised Expectations
- Longer-term Changes
- Results, so far

# NRC's Mission Depends on Effective Communication

- NRC is an independent regulator responsible for protecting public health, safety and the environment
- By law, NRC regulates the U.S. Department of Energy to assure safety of the potential repository at Yucca Mountain
- NRC uses a public rulemaking process

# **Inviting Public Comment on New Regulations for Yucca Mountain**

- **NRC published proposed regulations for comment (February 1999)**
- **Public Meetings in Nevada (March 1999)**
  - **Local concerns not addressed**
  - **NRC staff needed more and better preparation**
  - **Initial meetings did not inspire confidence**



## The Challenge:

- NRC's technical staff wants to explain agency actions and listen to public concerns but...
- To do so, we often must explain complex technical and policy issues in a manner readily understood by the public

# Different Communication Styles and Needs

- Technical Staff typically
  - Work with technical information
  - Communicate with other experts
  - Use detailed, intricate explanations
- Public generally
  - May not understand technical details
  - Have variety of questions and concerns
  - Demand short, common sense explanations

# What did NRC do to improve future meetings?

- Identified lessons from initial meetings
- Allowed staff more time to prepare
- Designated a project manager

## What else did NRC do?

- Expert training in risk communication
- Revamped meeting format
  - Trained facilitator
  - Shorter, plain language presentations
  - Addressed requested topics
  - Anticipated concerns and questions
  - Frequent breaks for questions and dialog
- Prompt, formal meeting follow-up

# How did NRC's HLW staff bring about these changes?

- HLW Public Outreach Team
- Revised NRC expectations of interactions with the public
- Supported longer-term culture changes within NRC as a whole

# HLW Public Outreach Team

- Brings together technical and administrative professionals
- Meets regularly
- Defines clear messages
- Identifies key concepts for “plain language translation”
- Organizes preparation for public meetings
- Develops handouts and displays



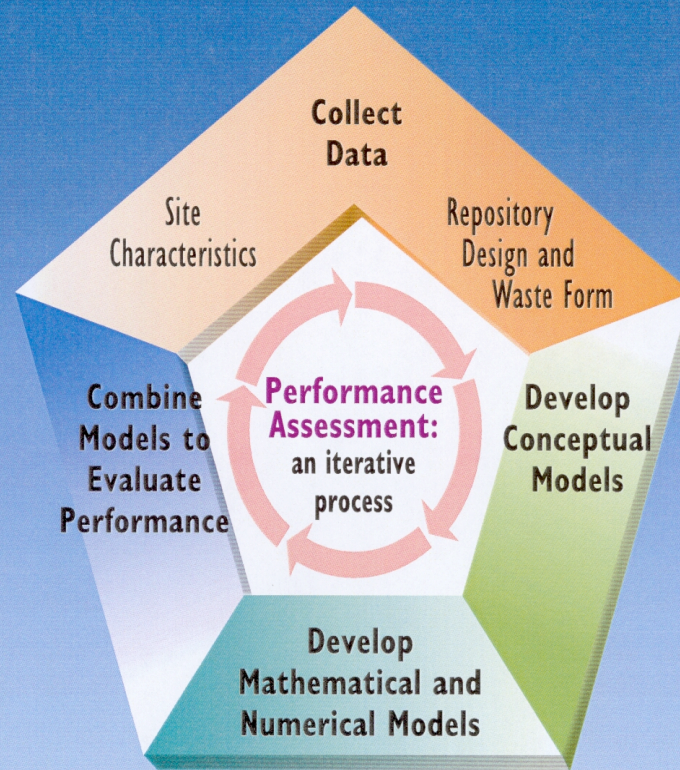
# Performance Assessment: Part of Evaluating the Safety of a Proposed Repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada

## What is Performance Assessment?

- Systematic analysis of what could happen at a repository
- One of many NRC safety requirements

## Why use it?

- Complex system
- Systematic way to evaluate data
- Internationally accepted approach



## What is assessed?

- What can happen?
- How likely is it?
- What can result?

## How is it conducted?

- Collect data
- Develop scientific models
- Develop computer code
- Analyze results

## NRC would require DOE's Performance Assessment to

- Provide site and design data
- Describe barriers that isolate waste
- Evaluate features, events, and processes that affect safety
- Provide technical basis for models and parameters
- Account for variability and uncertainty
- Evaluate results from alternative models



# Revised NRC Expectations for Public Interactions

- Improve common understanding of technical and policy topics
- Enable a more meaningful dialogue
- Explain, not persuade



# Longer-term Changes

- HLW Communication Plan
- More Coordination Between NRC Offices
- International Forums
- Commitment of staff and resources

# Agency-Wide Focus

- Communication Plans
- Task Force on External Communications
- NRC Director of Communications
- Agency “Guidelines for External Risk Communication” (NUREG/BR-0308)

## **Results, so far, are encouraging**

- New approach successful at 29 meetings
- Positive feedback from local officials
- Many informed comments from wide array of stakeholders on NRC proposals
- Requests from public for more meetings