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National Academy of Sciences Radioactive Waste Transportation Study

Las Vegas, NV, July 18, 2003. Hello. My name is Jennifer Viereck, and I provide children's and family programs at a small Family Resource Center in southeastern Inyo County, California. Inyo lies about 17 miles from Yucca Mt., and five miles from its groundwater monitoring perimeter. As I have listened to the proceedings today, I have given a lot of thought to what I might speak to you about, what knowledge I might have that would be most useful to this panel. I have decided to offer you a vignette of one small section of the routes you are gathered to study, what might well be the last two hours of any nuclear waste cask's journey to Yucca Mt. from around the United States.

You have not seen my community on any maps displayed here today. It is that blank area just below the Nevada border, usually used for a pullout map of the Repository site or of Las Vegas. I probably live considerably closer to Yucca Mt. than any person in this room. According to the DOE, our area will eventually become uninhabitable. The only question is how many generations of grandchildren we may have before then, and what defects and diseases will signify the end. All water and most wind from the portion of the Nevada Test Site that includes Yucca Mt. flows to the south, to California. We have already been exposed to bomb fallout since 1951. As it is very hot, we drink much more than the liter a day used to calculate safe drinking water exposures. Timbisha Shoshone and other families are multi-generational, leading to cumulative exposures that will be passed on genetically.

Following that path south from Yucca Mt. is CA State Route 127, basically a narrow paved-over wagon trail, with unbanked corners and one very steep grade. You could fit the entire road, and the businesses and homes along each side, within the width of this conference room. Ours is a rural area, without sidewalks. Our schools, stores, cafes and homes sit within feet of the highway. Our exposures are higher than calculated, because of this proximity. We have one California Highway Patrol officer who covers all 1250 square miles, and two Deputy Sheriffs who are not always on duty at the same time. Our volunteer rescue team consists of the local postmistress, her retired husband, the town mechanic, and several other individuals. This is our front line of defense.

Along that narrow desert road travel many of the 1.4 million tourists visiting Death Valley each year from all over the world, frequently driving unfamiliar rentals and oversized camping vehicles. Also using the road are most of the 30-50 weekly trucks carrying toxic waste to the hazardous dump in Beatty, NV, which, due to mischaracterized waste in the past, already has its own plutonium groundwater plume. We lose these trucks periodically on the sharp corner north of Shoshone. Low-level nuclear waste that has been successfully routed away from Las Vegas also shares this road, averaging 14 trucks a week last time I checked. Until July 11th, all 1600 barrels of transuranic weapons waste now at the Nevada Test Site were scheduled for

trucking to the WIPP site in New Mexico down Route 127, starting this month. Also, plutonium pits, or bomb triggers, now at the Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico were scheduled to move up 127 to the Test Site until recently, as well. These are political decisions, and they could change at any time.

Crossing back and forth under Route 127 thirteen times between Nevada and Baker, CA, is the Amargosa River, third largest in the western US. As this river flows primarily underground until flash floods occur, the danger of sudden road washouts and cave-ins is very great. Many non-desert dwellers do not understand that while we may



The flooded Amargosa and Route 127, probably 1983. Note the tiny car on the right side, just below the mountains.

only get 4 inches of rain a year, we can get it all in an hour. Flowing through sedimentary sand and gravel, this river changes channels often, and rapidly. I have fallen into caverns like subway tunnels in the China Ranch area. In the last 25 years, flash floods have led to at least one vehicle rollover and drowning, road closures for up to two weeks, requiring air deliveries of dry ice and food, and canoe and boat races between the towns of Shoshone and Tecopa, usually ten dry miles apart. I have documented severe incidents in 1943, 1978, 1982, 1983, when the bridge behind the Tecopa Post Office washed away, 1984, and 1993. The 1984 incident is still referred to as the Third Annual Hundred Year Flood. USGS studies of floods in the Test Site and Yucca Mt. area in 1995 and 1998 document piles of debris from the nuclear bomb range along highway 95, which you drove past yesterday. These waters could rapidly move entire trucks, let alone radioactive particles.

In closing, I encourage you to speak with local people wherever you go, as you do your research around the country. Rural people know their land, and they are often the only ones who do. You will not find the information I have shared with you in any database, newspaper archive, or website other than my own. I have shown you only 150 miles of the nation's nuclear waste transportation routes, but they could be highly significant ones- subjected to a majority of high-level shipments, in addition to their already existing radioactive burden.

I will separately submit a copy of the Peoples' Nuclear Waste Policy, a collaborative effort of residents and experts from both nuclear reactor and proposed high-level dump communities seeking a viable solution to the nation's nuclear waste burden. More information can be found at <http://www.h-o-m-e.org/forum>. Thank you for your time and attention.