

Testimony of Jim Dushaw  
On behalf of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

Before the Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality,  
U.S. House of Representatives

On the proposed Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository

**April 18, 2002**

My name is Jim Dushaw and I am the Utility Department Director for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the IBEW.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of IBEW President Ed Hill, and IBEW members, especially worker members who are associated with the commercial nuclear power industry, thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository issue.

The IBEW is a labor union with approximately 780,000 members, including many workers at nuclear facilities. Of the 70,000 union jobs within the nuclear industry, the IBEW represents 15,000 full-time workers at 74 nuclear stations. Thousands more IBEW members rotate through the plants with the contractor work force as needed for maintenance and refueling outages. With a history of work in the commercial nuclear industry dating back to the 1950s, and the test reactor at Shippingport, Pennsylvania, IBEW nuclear workers can say without reservation that this is an industry with a proven record of exceptional safety. It is among the safest industrial work environments in the United States.

The commercial nuclear industry is a source of high quality, safe, well-paying jobs for tens of thousands of IBEW members and many others as well. Does it follow then that our union is biased in favor of sustaining nuclear power? Yes, but that is not the exclusive reason for the IBEW's support for moving forward with development at Yucca Mountain.

I am not an engineer, physicist, geologist, nor do I profess to have any special technical knowledge relevant to the Yucca Mountain issue. However, IBEW members want common sense to be heard on this issue. We applaud the President's decision to move forward with development of a spent fuel repository at Yucca Mountain, and urge Congress to approve the President's decision over the state of Nevada's objection.

We support the President's decision on several counts; most importantly, the IBEW has, at least since the late 1970s, adopted formal resolutions during several consecutive IBEW International Conventions, the union's highest governing body, that deal particularly with the need for "expediting" the establishment of a federal repository for nuclear waste. A

similar resolution was passed without exception by delegates to the 36<sup>th</sup> IBEW International Convention September 12, 2001.

Mr. Chairman, the IBEW is by name and fact an organization associated with the energy industry. We are also consumers, environmentalists and working folks. We engage in energy policy issues often, and we do so from many perspectives. The development of public policy with respect to energy, environmental protections, and the well-being of the nation now and for the future, is of great concern for IBEW members.

The IBEW view is that there is a compelling need for the nation to develop in a thoughtful, but accelerated and safe fashion, all domestic energy resources, including nuclear, in order to fuel economic growth, provide jobs for a growing population, protect our environment, assure energy and, therefore, economic security. For all of these reasons, the nation can ill afford indecisive outcomes on vital energy issues in such threatening times as have come upon us.

We are satisfied to leave the technical discussion, of which the Yucca Mountain debate is overflowing, to the qualified experts. The IBEW has confidence that the President of the United States has made a fully informed decision on the scientific merits in approving the Energy Secretary's recommendation of Yucca Mountain as a permanent nuclear waste storage site. We believe that in the range of alternative solutions, none compare well with the Yucca Mountain plan, which intends to place spent fuel and nuclear waste where the potential for any harm and any access is tightly controlled and monitored.

If plants start closing down due to a lack of spent fuel storage space, jobs will disappear, and consumers, for no compelling reason, lose a real contender for low-cost electricity in the newly competitive electric supply industry. If even one plant is forced to shut down because of a lack of spent fuel storage space, hundreds, possibly thousands, of jobs will be irretrievably lost. Forcing higher than necessary costs on plant operation with on-site storage makes no sense, as consumers suffer the consequences.

It is clear the nation needs to have a place to put the used nuclear fuel to ensure continued operation of our nuclear power plants. Scientists have been studying Yucca Mountain for more than a decade. This mountain is the most extensively defined piece of property in the world. DOE's viability assessment shows that based upon the scientific studies of Yucca Mountain, there are no "showstoppers" to continuing development of this urgently needed facility. We are now twelve years behind the goal Congress set forth in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

It clearly makes sense that used nuclear fuel should be stored at one centralized storage facility. Fuel is currently stored at more than 130 long-term storage facilities in 39 states. According to the DOE Environmental Impact Statement of 1999, there is significantly more protection for the American public and the environment if we have one central federal repository. We should not pass this problem onto our children and grandchildren, especially since science has proven that we can safely transport and store the fuel at Yucca Mountain.

It is a fact that the spent nuclear fuel can be transported safely. Our existing laws and regulations provide for the safe loading, packaging, transportation and unloading of all kinds of nuclear materials today. There is no reason to believe that the continued transportation of radioactive materials will be any less safe. Union workers are justifiably proud of their safety record in transporting radioactive cargo – both by rail and by truck.

The federal government has a legal obligation to manage and dispose of the used fuel created by the nation's electric utilities. For twenty years, consumers of electricity, including union workers, have paid more than \$17 billion into a federal trust fund to pay for the disposal of used nuclear fuel. Only about six billion of these dollars have been spent on the Yucca Mountain project. Congress should move expeditiously to see that the federal government lives up to its lawful responsibility and begins managing the used nuclear fuel as promised.

Science shows that Yucca Mountain is a suitable repository for the used nuclear fuel. In addition, we have proven that we can transport radioactive cargos without harming American citizens or the environment. It just makes sense that we continue forward with Yucca Mountain as the repository for our nation's used nuclear fuel. There's much more than jobs at stake here. The IBEW submits that this issue is a challenge to the nation's will and determination to preserve and further develop all safe energy options.

Thank you.

## SUMMARY STATEMENT

- The IBEW is a labor union with approximately 780,000 members and represents 15,000 full-time workers at 74 nuclear stations. Thousands more IBEW members rotate through the plants with the contractor work force.
- IBEW nuclear workers can say without reservation that this is an industry with a proven record of exceptional safety.
- IBEW members want common sense to be heard on this issue and applauds the President's decision to move forward with Yucca Mountain.
- IBEW members are concerned with development of public policy with respect to energy and environment.
- The nation can ill afford indecisive outcomes on vital energy issues.
- IBEW is confident that the President of the United States has made a fully informed decision on the scientific merits of Yucca Mountain.
- Of alternative solutions, none compare well with Yucca Mountain, where the potential for harm is best controlled and monitored.
- If operating nuclear plants start closing, jobs will disappear, consumers lose low-cost electricity.
- Forcing higher than necessary costs with on-site storage makes no sense.
- DOE's viability assessment shows no "showstoppers".
- We are twelve years behind the goal set forth in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.
- It makes sense that used nuclear fuel should be stored at one centralized storage facility as opposed to more than 130 long-term storage facilities in 41 states.
- Existing laws and regulations provide for the safe loading, packaging, transportation and unloading of all kinds of nuclear materials. No reason to believe that radioactive materials will be any less safe.
- Federal government has a legal obligation to manage and dispose of the used fuel.
- Consumers have paid more than \$17 billion into federal trust fund to pay for the disposal of used nuclear fuel.
- The federal government should live up to its lawful responsibility.
- This issue is a challenge to the nation's will and determination to preserve and further develop all safe, affordable, reliable energy options capable of sustaining reasonably projected needs.