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Nuclear Regulatory Commission restarts Yucca Mountain licensing process

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The nation's top nuclear energy regulator voted on Tuesday to proceed with the information-gathering stage of approving a license for the contentious nuclear waste storage site at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission voted 2-1 to begin actions related to the review of the Department of Energy's license to build the radioactive waste facility after the Obama administration attempted to scuttle the program entirely.

"These next steps involve information-gathering activities related to the suspended adjudication on the application," the regulatory agency said in a statement. "These activities will enable efficient, informed decisions in support of executing any further appropriations of funds for the High-Level Waste Program."

The commission also approved the use of \$110,000 from the \$634,000 it has in reserve to conduct activities solely for the purpose of building the Yucca facility.

The commission will hold a "virtual meeting" of a licensing-support advisory committee "to provide information to, and gather input from, advisory panel members and the public regarding reconstitution of the Licensing Support Network or a suitable replacement system." The licensing network is a database created as a resource to aid in approving the Yucca Mountain construction license and is being revamped. The database had been dismantled by the Obama administration.

The database contains nearly 4 million documents supporting the adjudicatory hearing on the Yucca Mountain application. The hearing will be held in Nevada at a later date, when the commission will hear Nevada's contentions against building the Yucca Mountain site. The Obama administration had sought to close the Yucca program as a favor to then-Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev. The state has a long-held position of opposing the project.