



**COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS  
YUCCA MOUNTAIN PROJECT  
CHURCHILL COUNTY, NEVADA**

**June 2011**

**Prepared For:  
Churchill County  
Board of County Commissioners**

**Prepared By:  
Churchill County  
Nuclear Waste Project Office  
and Churchill County High School  
Advanced Placement Chemistry Class**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

The characterization of Yucca Mountain as a potential site for the first high-level nuclear repository is opposed by the State of Nevada. Responses to surveys conducted by the State of Nevada (most recently 2006) suggest that roughly 70 percent of Nevada residents who vote against a repository if they actually had a chance to vote on the project. The State survey results primarily reflect the opinions of Clark County residents.

The State survey was intended to represent the views of the State in general, but provides little or no insight about the opinions and beliefs held by Churchill County residents with respect to the repository program. In 2008 Churchill County began an effort to track public opinion.

As part of its impact assessment and oversight program, Churchill County initiated a community survey to gauge opinion about the Yucca Mountain Project and nuclear power. Survey questions were directly related to the Yucca Mountain project and more generally related to nuclear energy, and transportation of nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain. The 2011 Survey questions can be found in Appendix A. Several of the questions used in this year's survey were the same as those used by the Nuclear Energy Institute to gauge public opinion about nuclear waste and nuclear energy. Additionally, survey questions #2 and #3 were changed to focused on the Yucca Mountain licensing process.

Churchill County High School students randomly selected 385 registered voters in order to ascertain the views and knowledge of the repository program. This year the Churchill County survey focused on issues that have been the subject of national survey efforts related to Yucca Mountain. Churchill County reviewed several national survey efforts and selected questions relevant to Yucca Mountain. Churchill County High School Students completed survey interview questions by phone and face to face interviews.

When available the Churchill County survey responses from the last two years will be compared with responses from national survey efforts. Using similar questions allows for comparability with other survey results concerning the Yucca Mountain project. Such comparisons can be found in Section 3.0 of this report.

### **1.2 Summary of Findings**

This section summarizes the responses from the 385 Yucca Mountain community survey. Approximately 92 percent of the survey respondents were familiar with the Yucca Mountain Project and the federal government's efforts to store spent nuclear fuel in Nevada (Table 2-1).

Churchill County survey respondents were asked whether they are in favor or opposed to a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. Approximately 55 percent of survey respondents are in favor of a repository at Yucca Mountain (Table 2-2). Those favoring the repository increased more than ten (10) percent over the 2009 results. An even higher percentage of survey respondents want to see the Yucca Mountain licensing review continue (Table 2-3). Approximately 60 percent of survey respondents want the license review to continue which is 5 percent higher than those supporting Yucca Mountain. The number supporting the Yucca Mountain licensing review jumps to 65 percent when licensing is linked to construction of new nuclear power plants and the nation's future energy needs (Table 2-4).

As seen in last year's results, tying Yucca Mountain to energy production influences favorable opinions of the project. In last year's community survey, support for Yucca Mountain grew substantially when the repository program was linked to economic growth and a reduction and global warming. Just over 80 percent of the respondents would favor a repository under those conditions.

Approximately 71 percent of community survey respondents either strongly favored or somewhat favored nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity in the United States (Table 2-5). The percent of Churchill County survey respondents favoring nuclear energy as a means to provide electricity is similar to national survey results (Figure 3-1). In 2009, national surveys showed a surge in support for nuclear energy. Approximately 70 percent of national survey respondents either strongly supported or somewhat supported nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity.

The majority of survey respondents believe that nuclear power and Yucca Mountain play a critical role in the Nation's energy future, they are equally convinced that radioactive waste can be transported safely to Yucca Mountain. Approximately 62.3 percent of respondents were very confident or somewhat confident that waste could be transported safely (Table 2-6) in 2011, and increase in nearly 5 percent over 2010 results.

Respondents were then told about the safety record of nuclear waste shipments in the United States over the last 35 years. After hearing the safety record, nearly 73 percent of survey respondent became more confident in the safety of nuclear waste shipments (Table 2-7). Confidence in the safety of waste shipments over the last two years has increased by almost 20 percent among Churchill County survey respondents.

## 2.0 SURVEY RESULTS

### 2.1 Community Survey Results

This section contains community survey results for Churchill County. A complete community survey can be found in Appendix A. Survey respondents were first asked whether or not they were familiar with the Yucca Mountain Project. About 92 percent of survey respondents indicated that they were familiar with the project. Frequency tabulations are shown for each survey question.

Question Are you familiar with the Yucca Mountain Project and the federal government's efforts to store spent nuclear fuel in Nevada?

| <b>Table 2-1</b> | <b>Survey Respondent</b> |                |
|------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Response</b>  | <b>Frequency</b>         | <b>Percent</b> |
| Yes              | 352                      | 91.7           |
| No               | 32                       | 8.3            |

Question 1. Are you in favor or opposed to a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada?

| <b>Table 2-2</b> | <b>Survey Respondent</b> |                |
|------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Response</b>  | <b>Frequency</b>         | <b>Percent</b> |
| In Favor         | 203                      | 54.7           |
| Opposed          | 168                      | 45.3           |

Question 2. The Yucca Mountain repository is currently undergoing an extensive independent scientific review to determine if the site can be built and

operated safely. After spending more than \$10 billion studying Yucca Mountain, the Obama Administration wants to terminate the repository project before completing the on-going independent scientific review.

| <b>Table 2-3</b>      |                  | <b>Survey Respondent</b> |  |
|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Response</b>       | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b>           |  |
| Continue the review   | 216              | 60.0                     |  |
| Terminate the project | 144              | 40.0                     |  |

Question 3. Terminating the Yucca Mountain Project now could result in substantial delays in the construction of new nuclear power plants and meeting the nation's future energy needs, and it will cost billions in additional government expenditures to develop a new site. Knowing this should the licensing review of Yucca Mountain continue or terminate?

| <b>Table 2-4</b>      |                  | <b>Survey Respondent</b> |  |
|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Response</b>       | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b>           |  |
| Continue the Review   | 226              | 64.6                     |  |
| Terminate the Project | 124              | 35.4                     |  |

Question 4. Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity in the United States?

| <b>Table 2-5</b> |                  | <b>Survey Respondent</b> |  |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Response</b>  | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b>           |  |
| Strongly Favor   | 169              | 44.5                     |  |
| Somewhat Favor   | 102              | 26.8                     |  |
| Somewhat Oppose  | 52               | 13.7                     |  |
| Strongly Oppose  | 57               | 15.0                     |  |

Churchill County survey respondents show a similar level of support for nuclear energy as



national survey respondents. In 2009, 70 percent of national survey respondents strongly favored or somewhat favored nuclear energy.

Question 5. How confident are you that radioactive waste from America’s nuclear power plants will be transported safely to the Yucca Mountain disposal site? Are you very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?

| <b>Table 2-6</b>     |                  | <b>Survey Respondent</b> |  |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Response</b>      | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b>           |  |
| Very Confident       | 126              | 32.7                     |  |
| Somewhat Confident   | 114              | 29.6                     |  |
| Not too confident    | 62               | 16.1                     |  |
| Not confident at all | 83               | 21.6                     |  |

Question 6. Radioactive waste is transported in rugged vault-like containers, under strict regulations, using cautious procedures, and in collaboration with state agencies. In the past 35 years, there have been more than 3,000 shipments of this radioactive waste across a total of nearly 2 million miles, and no radiation leaks. After hearing this statement, how confident are you that the radioactive waste from America’s nuclear power plants will be transported safely to the proposed Yucca Mountain disposal site?

| <b>Table 2-7</b>     |                  | <b>Survey Respondent</b> |  |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Response</b>      | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b>           |  |
| Very Confident       | 179              | 46.6                     |  |
| Somewhat Confident   | 100              | 26.1                     |  |
| Not too Confident    | 45               | 11.7                     |  |
| Not Confident at All | 60               | 15.6                     |  |

Question 7. Age of Respondent (survey respondent)

| <b>Table 2-8</b>   | <b>Survey Respondents</b> |      |
|--------------------|---------------------------|------|
| <b>Response</b>    |                           |      |
| Average Age        | 56.6 yrs                  |      |
| Median Age         | 55 yrs                    |      |
| 60 years or older  | 149                       | 40.8 |
| 25 to 60 years old | 203                       | 55.3 |
| Less than 25 years | 13                        | 3.6  |

Question 8. Length of Residency in Churchill County

| <b>Table 2-9</b>   | <b>Churchill County<br/>Survey Respondents</b> |         |
|--------------------|--|---------|
| <b>Response</b>    |  |         |
| Average Length     | 26.8 yrs                                       | Percent |
| Median Length      | 23 yrs   |         |
| 1-10 years         | 81   | 21.9    |
| 10-20 years        | 87   | 23.6    |
| More than 20 years | 201  | 54.5    |

Question 9 Sex of Respondent

| <b>Table 2-10</b> | <b>Churchill County<br/>Survey Respondent</b> |                |
|-------------------|---|----------------|
| <b>Response</b>   | <b>Frequency</b>                              | <b>Percent</b> |
| Male              | 171   | 44.4           |
| Female            | 214   | 55.6           |

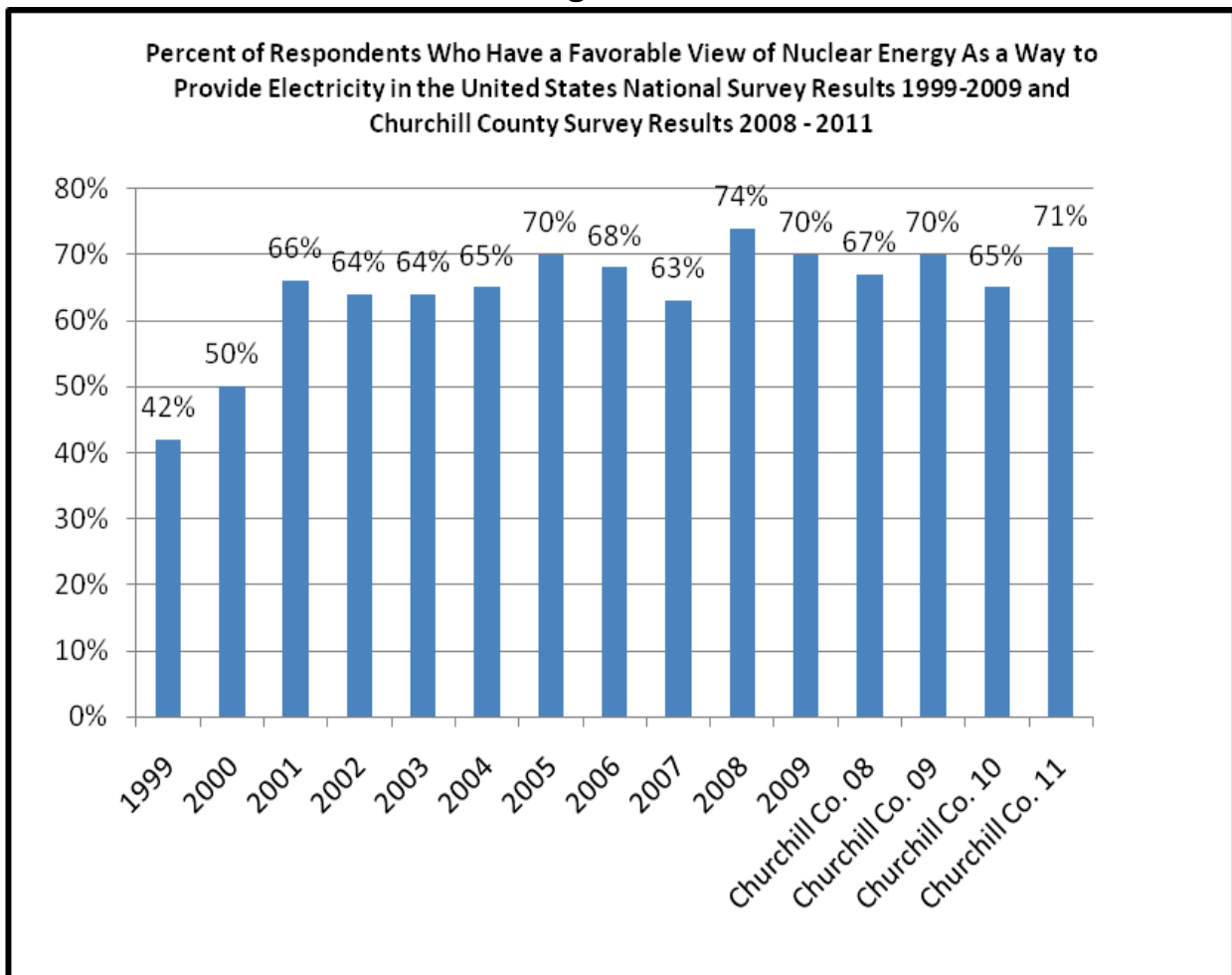
### 3.0 COMPARISON OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Section 3.0 compares the result of the 2011 Churchill County survey to national survey responses and survey responses from past community survey results. The Nuclear Energy Institute conducted a number of survey efforts related to Yucca Mountain and nuclear energy use over the last several years. Among national and Churchill County survey respondents, support for nuclear power remains strong.

#### Question:

**Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity in the United States?**

**Figure 3-1**



As compared to national survey results, Churchill County survey respondents have a slightly more favorable view of nuclear energy as a source of electricity in the United States. Overall, there is an increasing favorable view of nuclear energy among national and Churchill County survey respondents.

**Question. Are you in favor or opposed to a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada?**

| Table 3-1<br>Response | 2009 Survey<br>Churchill County |         | 2010 Survey<br>Churchill County |         | 2011 Survey<br>Churchill County |         |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|
|                       | Frequency                       | Percent | Frequency                       | Percent | Frequency                       | Percent |
| In Favor              | 144                             | 44.7    | 202                             | 51.2    | 203                             | 54.7    |
| Opposed               | 178                             | 55.3    | 192                             | 48.8    | 168                             | 45.3    |

**Question** Radioactive waste is transported in rugged vault-like containers under strict regulations using cautious procedures, and in collaboration with state agencies. In the past 35 years, there have been more than 3,000 shipments for this radioactive waste across a total of nearly 2 million miles, and no radiation leaks.

**After hearing this statement how confident are you that the radioactive waste from America’s nuclear power plants will be transported safely to the proposed Yucca Mountain disposal site?**

| Table 3-2<br>Churchill County<br>Response  | 2011 Survey |      | 2010 Survey |      | 2009 Survey |      | 2008 Survey |      |
|--|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
|  | Freq.       | %    | Freq.       | %    | Freq.       | %    | Freq.       | %    |
| Very Confident/<br>Somewhat Confident      | 279         | 72.7 | 259         | 65.6 | 219         | 66.6 | 181         | 54.0 |
| Not Too Confident/<br>Not Confident at All | 105         | 27.3 | 136         | 34.4 | 110         | 33.4 | 155         | 46.0 |

In 2011 almost 73 percent of Churchill County survey respondents were very confident or somewhat confident that waste could be transported safely to Yucca Mountain. Survey respondents indicating that they were very confident to somewhat confident increased by almost 20 percent from 2008 to 2011.

## Appendix A: Survey

Churchill County is conducting this survey as part of its oversight responsibilities of the Yucca Mountain project. Funding for the survey is provided by the Yucca Mountain Oversight Program. Churchill County High School students have volunteered to conduct this survey. All responses will remain confidential.

Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to begin by asking the following questions:

Are you familiar with the Yucca Mountain Project and the federal government's efforts to store spent nuclear fuel in Nevada?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 1.

Are you in favor or opposed to a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada?

In Favor \_\_\_\_\_

Opposed \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 2

The Yucca Mountain repository is currently undergoing an extensive independent scientific review to determine if the site can be built and operated safely. After spending more than \$10 billion studying Yucca Mountain, the Obama Administration wants to terminate the repository project before completing the on-going independent scientific review.

Should the licensing review be allowed to continue? \_\_\_\_\_

Or terminate the project and start over? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 3:**

Terminating the Yucca Mountain Project now could result in substantial delays in the construction of new nuclear power plants and meeting the nation's future energy needs, and it will cost billions in additional federal government expenditures to develop a new repository site. Knowing this should the licensing review of Yucca Mountain continue or terminate?

Continue the Review \_\_\_\_\_

Terminate the Project \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 4:**

Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity in the United States?

1. Strongly Favor \_\_\_\_\_

2. Somewhat Favor \_\_\_\_\_

3. Somewhat Oppose \_\_\_\_\_

4. Strongly Oppose \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5:**

How confident are you that radioactive waste from America's nuclear power plants will be transported safely to the Yucca Mountain disposal site. Are you very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?

1. Very Confident \_\_\_\_\_

2. Somewhat Confident \_\_\_\_\_

3. Not too Confident \_\_\_\_\_

4. Not Confident at All \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 6:**

Radioactive waste is transported in rugged vault-like containers, under strict regulations, using cautious procedures, and in collaboration with state agencies. In the past 35 years, there have been more than 3,000 shipments of this radioactive waste across a total of nearly 2 million miles, and no radiation leaks. Yucca Mountain shipments will have security escorts, tracking systems and operate under reduced speeds.

After hearing this statement, how confident are you that the radioactive waste from America’s nuclear power plants will be transported safely to the proposed Yucca Mountain disposal site? Are you very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?

- 1. Very Confident \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Somewhat Confident \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Not too Confident \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Not Confident at all \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Demographic Questions-Survey Respondents**

- 1. Age of Respondent (Survey respondent)\_\_\_\_\_Years
- 2. Length of residency in Churchill County\_\_\_\_\_ years.
- 3. Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_