

Opponents win delays in Yucca Mountain dump

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LAS VEGAS - The federal government's campaign to put a nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain in Nevada is in trouble, encountering setbacks during the past year that raise questions about when and even if the project will go forward.

The state has stunned federal officials with its tenacity, legal skill and evolving political acumen, scoring key victories in federal court and in Congress that have repeatedly stalled the project 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

Last year, the state won its biggest legal victory, when a federal appeals court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency's standard for radiation emissions from the dump violated federal law. Now, instead of assuring public safety for 10,000 years, peak radiation emissions must be safe over the life of the dump, potentially 1 million years.

Whether such health standards can be met is unknown. EPA officials say they will propose a new standard later this year, though outside experts say it could take years to finalize a rule. Until then, the Energy Department has no hope of getting a license for the dump.

As a result, Energy officials say the project to bury nuclear waste safely from power plants and bomb production will be delayed two more years beyond the projected June 2010 start up.

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