



MEETING MINUTES

Underground Test Area (UGTA) Committee

Date: May 21, 2008 - Las Vegas, Nevada

Members Present: Bob Gatliff, Chair;

Members Not Present: Jim Weeks, Vice Chair; Dave Hermann; Robert Johnson; Engelbrecht von Tiesenhausen (Alumni); Walt Wegst

Liaisons Present: Bob Gamble, Nye County; Mark McLane, (for Tim Murphy) Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP); Genne Nelson, U.S. National Park Service

U.S. Department of Energy: Bill Wilborn, Federal Sub-Project Director

Technical Support: Dr. Helen Neill, UNLV

Facilitator: Rosemary Rehfeldt, Navarro Research and Engineering, Inc.

Public Present: John McGrail; Herb Spiegel

The Committee's meeting objectives were to:

- Brief the attendees of the CAB's well site recommendations
- Update the committee of the CAB's participation with the UGTA Technical Working Group's (TWG) Corrective Action Investigation Plan (CAIP) committee
 - What the committee's activities are
 - What the committee is currently focusing on
- Group discussion, with questions and answers, on the CAIP and activities at Western Pahute Mesa on the Nevada Test Site

Because members of the public were present, Mr. Gatliff began the meeting by explaining the Nevada Test Site's (NTS) background, gave a brief history of underground nuclear testing at the NTS, a brief explanation of the Environmental Management (EM) program, and a brief description of the Underground Test Area (UGTA) project.

He went on to explain that, in response to stakeholder's concerns, in 2002 Mr. Carl Gertz, former Assistant Manager for DOE's Environmental Management at the Nevada Site Office, offered the NTS CAB the opportunity to locate a site to drill a monitoring well. The NTS CAB submitted their initial recommendation letter in 2005, recommending three well sitings. Mr. Gatliff mentioned that the details of these recommendations can be found in two reports written in 2007 by the CAB and the CAB's technical support staff.

Mr. Gatliff also informed the committee that the UGTA Sub-Project is planning to drill 10 wells, beginning in 2009. However, due to budget restraints and the increased cost of drilling, the proposed drilling may be spread over a greater than three-year period.

Mr. Wilborn told the committee that these wells will be used to gather hydrologic and geologic data, and drilling is difficult because the areas of focus, primarily Central and Western Pahute Mesa, have complex geology.

Questions and answers followed:

Q: Who are the members of the CAIP committee?

A: There are 14 members of the CAIP group, composed of hydrologists, geologists, and source term modelers. Most of these committee members are also members of the UGTA Technical Working Group (TWG).

Q: Is more information available on the “bench” (geology).

A: This can be found in reports on the “Tybo” and “Benham” shots.

Q: Which well sites have detected radiological contamination away from the shot?

A: Contamination was found down-gradient from the “Tybo” shot.

Q: Has there been specific study of fractures? Logic would indicate convection would be there.

A: Yes, these studies have been conducted.

Q: From hydrostratigraphic reports, groundwater can be as deep as 10K feet, yet wells drilled on Pahute Mesa only go to a depth of 5K feet. Are any wells being considered that will be drilled deeper than 5K feet?

A: No. Well drilling is considered for major flow fields, and drilling costs are extremely high. Drilling can go as deep as 5K feet in volcanics, and 12K feet in carbonate aquifers.

Q: Will the well drilling be a phased approach?

A: Yes. Initial focus will be on the area that is most cost-effective. UGTA’s strategy is as follows:

- Drill wells
- Analyze data collected
- Input into computer models
- Assess the models – to the satisfaction of the NDEP

The UGTA Sub-Project activities are bound by the Federal Facility Agreement and Consent Order (FFACO), an agreement between the DOE and NDEP.

Q: What is the timeframe for drilling?

A: National Security Technologies (NSTec, a DOE contractor) has begun the drilling process. The first drilling campaign will drill three to four wells, and the data gathered will be processed. The timeframe depends on the budget per year versus availability of drillers.

Q: What will the CAB's use be once wells are drilled?

A: In order to dispel a negative perception issue, Mr. Carl Gertz gave the CAB an opportunity to recommend a well site. This required the CAB's UGTA committee to study the UGTA groundwater project. The CAB studied and became educated in this area and successfully submitted their well site recommendations and produced two reports. This information was communicated, via the CAB, to communities surrounding the NTS.

Going forward, the CAB will be:

- Given results on data analysis of the wells drilled
- Given results on data analysis of the CAB's chosen well drilled
- Given modeling results
- Taken on tour of the CAB well during/after drilling if requested
- Communicating information to the community via CAB public meetings

When studying the reports for potential well sitings, the CAB's UGTA Committee took a risk-based approach. The Committee picked the area that posed the highest risk to stakeholders. However, other sites need studying as well. With this in mind, the CAB's UGTA Committee can review documents as they come out and share information with stakeholders.

Q: Does the information that has been collected show that groundwater flowing toward Oasis Valley poses the highest risk?

A: The highest risk is from groundwater flow off of Pahute Mesa. Therefore, well siting focus for the CAIP group has been migratory paths leaving Pahute Mesa. However UGTA's strategy is the same for each area of the NTS - to study Frenchman Flat, Yucca Flat, Rainier Mesa/Shoshone Mountain, Central Pahute Mesa, and Western Pahute Mesa – no matter what the risk is.

Q: Will the first group of well locations be presented to the CAB?

A: Yes, as well as the transport model.

The Committee decided to reconvene in September 2008. A meeting date will be decided upon in August.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.