

Overview of Comments for the
Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future

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Progress in managing used nuclear fuel (UNF) in the US will be possible only if public confidence and acceptance storage and disposal facilities can be attained in host communities, and the affected state and local governments support the siting of those facilities. Survey research can provide important insight for efforts to design UNF policies and facilities that are broadly acceptable to the public. In these remarks I will summarize results of recent research on public understanding of the UNF issue, and support for UNF storage and disposal options in the US.

These observations are based on the analysis of a series of nation-wide surveys of the American public taken from 2006 to 2010. The most recent in this series of surveys, conducted in June of 2010, includes the beliefs and preferences expressed by over 2400 Americans concerning the management of used nuclear fuel (UNF). Use is also made of extensive study of public support for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico between 1995-2001. I will address the following questions:

- How do members of the public perceive the broader energy and environmental context of which UNF management is a part? How do they understand the balance of risks and benefits of reliance on nuclear energy?
- What do members of the public believe about the characteristics of UNF? What do they perceive to be the current practices and policies for managing UNF in the United States?
- What are Americans' preferences for current and alternative UNF policy options? How well developed and defined are public preferences concerning the management of UNF?
- How does variation in the design of UNF storage and disposal policies affect public acceptance of permanent disposal facility siting options? In particular, how does "bundling" of disposal facilities with other UNF management functions – such as research laboratories or reprocessing – affect public support for facility siting?
- How does proximity to a proposed facility affect levels of support or opposition to siting a UNF disposal facility? How has proximity affected support in the case of an operating nuclear waste repository (WIPP) among residents in New Mexico?