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cc: Katy Walton/D09/Caltrans/CAGov, Tom Meyers/D09/Caltrans/CAGov, Bill Costa/HQ/Caltrans/CAGov, Len Nelson/D03/Caltrans/CAGov, Alan Mills/HQ/Caltrans/CAGov,
Subject: Low-level Radioactive Waste Shipments on SR 127

I have been advised by a telephone call from the California Energy Commission that the Department of Energy Nevada Operations Office (the Nevada Test Site) has decided to begin shipments of low-level radioactive waste on State Route 127 in January, 2000. These shipments are from other DOE facilities (the primary current shipper is Fernald, Ohio) being sent to the NTS for disposal. The shipments used to travel on I15 to Las Vegas, then up US395 to the NTS, but DOE began using a route through northern Nevada last summer, in response to requests from Nevada, Las Vegas, and Clark County to move the shipments out of the Las Vegas Valley.

DOE has been looking for a southern, winter route for several months. They have decided to split the shipments between 160 in Nevada (through Pahrump) and 127 in Inyo and San Bernardino Counties. There will be up to 15 shipments per week from Fernald, with approximately half being routed up 127. Please note that these shipments are legal weight, are not "Highway Route-Controlled Quantities", and do not require permits.

The full routing in California is: I40 to Nipton Road, Nipton Road to I15, I15 to SR127, SR127 to the state line.

My assumption is that all the shipments will be placarded class 7 Radioactive, but I have a call in to DOE-NTS to confirm that. Shipment is in strong, tight metal containers, and my experience with these shipments is that they travel inside enclosed trailers.

The last incident that occurred involving these shipments was a leak of liquids, which was detected in the vicinity of Kingman, AZ. In that instance, there was no identified release of radioactive materials. Shipments were halted for about a year while defects in the shipping containers were investigated and corrected.

District 9 continues to be concerned with the use of secondary roads for the shipment of hazardous materials when there are shorter, faster, interstate highway routes available. Detouring to reduce political pressures while increasing the mileage and time traveled sets a dangerous precedent for both low-level and high-level radioactive waste shipments.