

How to talk with your child about Yucca Mountain

Children hear about Yucca Mountain on the news and hear adults expressing varying opinions about the proposed national high-level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain. Your child may be confused, concerned, or simply curious.

While many aspects of Yucca Mountain are political issues, there are many scientific, public safety and environmental matters to discuss and learn about.

Here are some tips on how to approach and respond to questions your family may have about Yucca Mountain.

#1 Stick to the facts. Yucca Mountain is an emotional topic for many Nevadans. While it's appropriate to discuss the pros and cons with your adult friends and family members, a heated debate based on emotion is seldom helpful to your children in dealing with such an abstract subject.

#2 Don't exaggerate. Hysteria helps no one, least of all your child. Tell your child about your personal opinions and thoughts in a calm tone. Be sure to emphasize that scientific claims are open to interpretation.

#3 Encourage independent research. Chances are your child is quite adept at surfing the Internet. Seek credible information together. A good place to start is Clark County's Nuclear Waste Division's Web site, www.accessclarkcounty.com. It details the results of the many studies Clark County has conducted to monitor potential impacts to residents of Clark County.

#4 Check the map together. Yucca Mountain is about 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. Find it on a map with your child, and discuss the distance in terms your child will understand. For example, "Yucca Mountain is like driving to Grandma and Grandpa's house four times."

#5 Read. If your older child takes an interest, he or she can read about current issues by checking the archives of the Las Vegas Review-Journal and Las Vegas Sun newspapers.

#6 Write to your county, state and national legislators. Allowing your child to express his or her views to elected representatives provides an important civics lesson in democracy.

#7 Make it a fun way to discuss science. Geology, geography, environmental issues—all can be related to Yucca Mountain. For example, some rocks in the area are 13 million years old.

#8 Explain the value of animals and plants living in the Yucca Mountain region. A diverse variety of animals populate the Yucca Mountain area. For example, insects, such as grasshoppers, caterpillars, crickets and cicadas can be found there. Lizards, especially the chuckwalla were hunted by early Native American Indian tribes. Also abundant in the area are desert tortoise, rodents, rabbits, and hares. Larger mammals, such as mule deer, bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope have lived in the area, as well as coyote, kit fox, badger, bobcat, mountain lion and long-tailed weasel. Plants include the creosote bush, bur sage, Mormon tea, shadscale and desert globemallow.

#9 A sense of safety is paramount. Let your child know that Clark County is taking precautions to protect residents and visitors by preparing for any radiological or other emergency. The Clark County Fire Department, for example, has a specialized Hazardous Materials team that is trained to handle a variety of chemical or other hazardous material emergencies.

#10 Explore ways to learn more. There are many resources where you can get information about Yucca Mountain.

Online:

Clark County: www.accessclarkcounty.com

Department of Energy: www.ymp.gov

Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov/radiation/yucca

Nuclear Energy Institute: www.nei.org

Nuclear Regulatory Commission: www.nrc.gov

State of Nevada Nuclear Waste: www.state.nv.s/nucwaste/index.htm

Yucca Mountain Project Office, DOE: www.ymp.gov

Clark County also provides speakers and video presentations on the topics of radiation, public safety, and the current status of the project to schools, community, professional and civic organizations. To arrange a presentation, please contact Public Information Officer Erik Muller, 455-5185.