Safety Framework for Disposal of Heat-Generating Waste in Salt: Features, Events, and Processes (FEPs) Classification

Fuel Cycle Research & Development

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1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Nuclear Energy (NE) Office of Used Nuclear Fuel Disposition (UFD) is conducting research and development (R&D) on generic deep geologic disposal systems (i.e., repositories) for high-activity nuclear wastes that exist today or that could be generated under future fuel cycles. The term high-activity waste (U.S. Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board 2011) refers collectively to both used nuclear fuel (UNF) from nuclear reactors and high-level radioactive waste (HLW) from reprocessing of UNF, and from other sources.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, DOE-NE together with the DOE Office of Environmental Management (DOE-EM) initiated an R&D effort for Salt Research and Development Investigations (SRDI), focused on gaining a further understanding of mined geologic disposal in salt (McMahon 2012). The primary SRDI activities undertaken in FY2012 and continued in FY2013 were:

- Activity 1: Existing Salt Data Compilation and Assessment
- Activity 2: Test Planning for Re-Entry into the North Experimental Area of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP)
- Activity 3: Thermal, Mechanical, Hydrologic, and Chemical Laboratory Studies Related to Salt
- Activity 4: Modeling Studies Related to Salt
- Activity 5: International Collaboration
- Activity 6: Salt Instrumentation Development and Test Methodologies

In support of SRDI Activity 4, an annotated outline of a safety framework for geologic disposal of heatgenerating waste at a generic salt site was produced in FY2012 (Freeze et al. (2012). The safety framework provides a structure for the advancement of a safety case for disposal in salt. An overview of the safety framework as it relates to the elements of a safety case is presented in Section 1.1.

This report expands on the annotated outline of the safety framework by presenting a classification structure for the features, events, and processes (FEPs) that describe a generic salt repository. The FEP classification structure is represented using a FEP matrix, where the axes of the matrix have a direct correlation to relevant performance assessment elements of the safety framework and the safety case. This correlation between FEP classification and the safety case elements supports an integrated management strategy and performance assessment model implementation that can be used to prioritize SRDI R&D activities via a risk-informed approach. An overview of the FEP analysis is presented in Section 1.2. The FEP classification matrix approach for a generic salt repository is described in Section 2.

This report addresses the following milestone:

• *Level 3 Milestone, Quality Rigor Level (QRL)3 –* Safety Framework for Disposal of Heat-Generating Waste in Salt (M3FT-13SN08180325)

1.1 Safety Framework and Safety Case Overview

The formal concept of a safety case for the long-term disposal of UNF and HLW in an engineered facility located in a deep geologic formation was first introduced by the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) (NEA 1999a). Initial discussion and documentation on the topic continued in NEA (2002), NEA (2004), and IAEA (2006). More recently, there have been a number of international symposia, conferences, working groups, and summary papers devoted to understanding, developing, and/or summarizing the nature, purpose, context, and elements of safety cases (e.g., NEA 2008; NEA 2009; IAEA 2011; Schneider et al. 2011; Van Luik et al. 2011; and NEA 2013). In these recent summary and overview reports, there is notable convergence in the understanding and development of safety case documents published by national and international organizations. From these documents, Freeze et al. (2012, Section 1.1) compiled the following definitions:

A safety case is an integrated collection of qualitative and quantitative arguments, evidence, and analyses that substantiate the safety, and the level of confidence in the safety, of a geologic repository. Two of its major roles are as a management tool to guide the work of the implementer (e.g., DOE) through the various phases of repository development and to communicate the understanding of safety to a broad audience of stakeholders (National Research Council 2003). With regard to the former, because of various technical uncertainties associated with a complex one-of-akind repository project, the safety understanding and basis evolves through time. The safety case assists in organizing and synthesizing existing knowledge and prioritizing the future R&D work during repository planning and development, in order to reduce uncertainties and enhance the confidence in safety.

A safety framework is not as detailed or complete as a safety case. The safety framework for salt disposal follows the outline of the elements of a safety case, identifies the types of information that will be required to satisfy the elements of the safety case, and anticipates where currently available generic information may exist. The development of a salt safety framework for salt disposal is consistent with the current UFD approach to generic repository R&D, and it provides an outline to organize the other SRDI activities in accordance with the safety case elements, thereby indicating where there are gaps in the documentation and research.

The following major elements of the salt safety framework, which map to the general elements of a safety case, are shown schematically in Figure 1-1. The safety framework structure can be used as a management tool to integrate and prioritize other SRDI testing and modeling activities via a risk-informed approach, and as a communication tool to inform stakeholders of SRDI results.

Modified from Freeze et al. (2012, Figure 1-1) and NEA (2004, Figure 1)

Figure 1-1. Major Elements of the Salt Safety Case

1.2 FEP Analysis Overview

Within the safety framework structure (Figure 1-1), FEP analysis is part of the Post-Closure Safety Assessment element. Post-closure safety assessments (also referred to as performance assessments (PAs)) pre-date the concept of a safety case. The historical context of safety assessment is described in NEA (1991) and NEA (1997); in addition, the role of safety assessment is discussed in the safety case reference documents identified in Section 1.1. For long-term geologic disposal, safety assessment generally refers to the quantitative analysis of post-closure disposal system performance (i.e., the period after the facility closure and beyond the time when active control of the facility can be relied on).

In a safety case, the post-closure safety assessment is supported by the Safety Strategy (specifically, the Assessment Strategy) and the Assessment Basis. As described in Freeze et al. (2012, Section 3.3), the assessment strategy can be formalized in terms of a safety assessment or PA methodology. The PA methodology consists of nine steps, which are progressively updated and repeated during the various phases of repository lifecycle (Meacham et al. 2011, Section 1.2.2). Figure 1-2 shows the sequential and iterative nature of these nine steps. Details of the general application of each of the steps are provided in Meacham et al. (2011, Section 1.2.2).

Source: Meacham et al. (2011, Figure 2) Figure 1-2. PA Methodology

As shown in Figure 1-2, FEP analysis is part of the scenario development step of the PA methodology, which in turn informs the construction of models and the uncertainty and sensitivity analyses. Formal FEP analysis includes: (1) FEP identification – the development and classification of a comprehensive list of FEPs that cover the entire range of phenomena that are potentially relevant to the long-term performance of a salt disposal system, and (2) FEP screening – the specification of a subset of important FEPs that individually, or in combination with other FEPs, may have a measurable or observable effect on long-term performance. These important FEPs must be included in the post-closure PA model. The exclusion of a FEP from the PA model (e.g., by low probability, by low consequence, or by inconsistency with regulation) must be supported by a defensible rationale. In the context of a safety framework, the included FEPs are indicative of technical areas where R&D focus may be necessary. R&D may also be necessary to provide robust, defensible screening rationales for excluded FEPs.

FEP identification for a range of generic disposal systems is documented in Freeze et al. (2010) and Freeze et al. (2011). The modification of these generic FEPs and a preliminary screening relative to the salt disposal reference case is documented in Sevougian et al. (2012, Section 3.1.2).

This report describes the development of a FEP classification matrix, where the axes of the matrix have a direct correlation to relevant performance assessment elements of the safety framework and the safety case. The FEP classification matrix is used to organize the salt repository FEPs by feature and by process/event. The FEP classification matrix approach for a generic salt repository is described in Section 2.

2. SALT REPOSITORY FEP CLASSIFICATION MATRIX

A preliminary set of 208 FEPs potentially relevant to the disposal of UNF and HLW in a generic salt disposal system are listed in Sevougian et al. (2012, Appendix A). The salt repository FEPs derive from a list of 208 UFD FEPs developed by Freeze et al. (2011, Appendix A) for a generic disposal system in any one of four different disposal concepts: mined crystalline/granite, mined shale/clay, mined salt, and deep borehole crystalline. The UFD FEPs in Freeze et al. (2011) were developed from several comprehensive FEP lists and other relevant information (NEA 1999b, Appendix D; NEA 2006; SNL 2008).

2.1 FEP Numbering and Categorization Scheme

The salt repository FEPs (and the UFD FEPs) are categorized using a hierarchical numbering scheme that is very similar to the NEA classification scheme (NEA 1999b, Section 3). The numbering and categorization hierarchy is shown schematically in Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1. Hierarchical FEP Numbering and Categorization Scheme

The hierarchical classification levels are organized around the common regions and features of a disposal system: the Engineered Barrier System (EBS) which includes the wastes (e.g., inventory and waste forms) and engineered features (e.g., waste container/package, buffer/backfill, and seals); the Natural Barrier System (NBS) or geosphere which includes the disturbed rock zone (DRZ), host rock, and other geological units; and the Biosphere which includes the surface environment and receptor characteristics. In addition to the region/feature-based categories, there are also categories for the Assessment Basis and External Factors.

The classification hierarchy is established using the FEP numbering scheme. The first four digits of a FEP number correspond to hierarchical classification levels:

- 4 Layers (entries having the form X.0.00.00). These are:
	- $0 =$ Assessment Basis.
	- $1 =$ External Factors,
	- 2 = Disposal System Factors, and
	- 3= Radionuclide/Contaminant Factors.
- 12 Categories (entries having the form X.X.00.00). Examples of Categories under Disposal System Factors (2.X.00.00) are:
	- 2.1 = Wastes and Engineered Features,
	- 2.2 = Geologic Environment,
	- 2.3 = Surface Environment.
- 43 Headings (entries having the form X.X.XX.00 or X.X.XX.50). Examples of Headings under Disposal System Factors – Wastes and Engineered Features (2.1.XX.00) are:
	- $2.1.01=$ Inventory, $2.1.02$ = Waste Form, $2.1.03$ = Waste Container, $2.1.04 = \text{Buffer/Backfill}$, $2.1.05 = Seals$, 2.1.06 = Other EBS Materials, $2.1.07$ = Mechanical Processes, $2.1.08$ = Hydrologic Processes, 2.1.09 = Chemical Processes - Chemistry, 2.1.09 = Chemical Processes - Transport, $2.1.10 = \text{Biological Processes}$. $2.1.11$ = Thermal Processes, $2.1.12 = Gas$ Sources and Effects,
	- $2.1.13$ = Radiation Effects,
	- $2.1.14$ = Nuclear Criticality.

These 59 classification entries provide an organization structure for the 208 FEPs, which all have UFD FEP Numbers in the form X.X.XX.XX. The first four digits of a FEP number serve to group related FEPs by their Layer, Category, and Heading. However, at the lowest classification level (Heading), there can be some redundancies. For example, the Heading entries shown above for Disposal System Factors – Wastes and Engineered Features consist of a mixture of feature-based Headings (e.g., 2.1.01 through 2.1.06) and thermal-hydrologic-mechanical-chemical-biological-radiological (THCMBR) process-based Headings (e.g., 2.1.07 through 2.1.14). Because an individual FEP is typically a process (or event) acting upon a feature, many FEPs can be mapped to more than one Heading in this NEA-based classification scheme (e.g., an Individual FEP can be often be mapped to both a feature-based Heading and to a process-based Heading). Therefore, this organizational structure makes it difficult to find a unique "home" for all FEPs, and can result in related FEPs not all being grouped under the same Heading.

2.2 FEP Classification Matrix Approach

As described in Section 2.1, the NEA-based numbering and categorization scheme can be used to organize a FEP list, but redundancies in the classification entries (i.e., the Headings) make it difficult to completely group related FEPs and therefore it can be difficult to find all related FEPs within the FEP list. To overcome this shortcoming, a FEP classification matrix approach was developed to help organize the salt repository FEPs. The FEP matrix approach is refined from an earlier application (SNL 2008, Section 6.1.3). The FEP matrix, shown in Figure 2-2, provides a two-dimensional organizational structure that consists of a Features axis that defines the "rows" and a Processes/Events axis that defines the "columns".

The Features axis is organized to generally correspond to the direction of flow and transport, from the waste to the receptor. Features are organized in hierarchical categories. At the top level are: Waste and Engineered Features (e.g., the Engineered Barrier System (EBS)), Geosphere Features (e.g., the Natural Barrier System (NBS)), Surface Features (e.g., the Biosphere), and System Features. Surface Features include FEPs that are relevant to the calculation of dose to the receptor, which may include radionuclide movement above the subsurface. System Features include FEPs that are potentially relevant to the repository system as a whole. As shown in Figure 2-2, there are lower-level categories below each of the top-level categories. For example, under Waste and Engineered Features are: Waste Form and Cladding, Waste Package and Internals, Buffer/Backfill, Emplacement Drifts/Tunnels (i.e., the open air regions that may be resent in non-backfilled open-mode designs), and Seals/Plugs. Below each of these subcategories, a further level of detail may also be specified (e.g., under Waste Form there may be a need for a distinction between SNF and HLW and commercial and defense waste). It should be noted that the hierarchical feature categories are fairly generic at the top level, but may become disposal option specific at the sub-levels. For example, the sub-categories below the Host Rock and below the Other Geologic Units are specific to a salt repository.

The Processes and Events axis contains categories for FEPs that can act upon a Feature. A description of each of the Processes and Events categories is provided below. Two categories require some clarification:

- **Characteristics** are used to describe the properties of the features that need to be evaluated. The characteristics are not typically FEPs in the sense that they cannot be screened in or out, but the characteristic information (and changes to that information) influences the screening of the other FEPs. For example, the initial radionuclide inventory is considered a characteristic of the waste form.
- **Thermal** processes (conduction, radiation, convection) are generally treated in a coupled fashion with the process affected by thermal conditions. For example, the processes are referred to as thermalmechanical, thermal-hydrologic, or thermal-chemical to indicate the principal couplings considered. The convention used to describe coupled processes places the principal causing process first and the affected process second. For example, thermal-chemical processes are those in which the thermal environment affects the behavior of the chemical environment. Generally, the reverse coupling (in this example, the effect of chemistry change on the thermal environment) is significantly weaker than the forward coupling. There is also an independent thermal process category, but past experience suggests it is usually difficult to isolate the thermal aspects of most FEPs.

A brief description of the Processes follows:

- **Mechanical** processes include drift degradation and a range of mechanical processes that affect the degradation of engineered features. These mechanical processes include salt creep, rockfall, drift collapse, stress corrosion cracking, hydrogen embrittlement, buckling, floor heave, metamorphism, and diagenesis, among others. Mechanical processes also include processes that change rock properties such as porosity. **Thermal-mechanical** processes include thermal stresses and their corresponding effects on rock mass strength and degradation.
- **Hydrologic** flow processes include precipitation, infiltration, runoff, unsaturated zone flow, flow diversion, capillarity, matrix imbibition, evaporation, condensation, and saturated zone flow. **Thermal-hydrologic** processes include evaporation, condensation, vapor flow, and temperaturedependent property changes.
- **Chemical** processes include those processes that affect the degradation mechanisms of engineered features. These chemical processes include such detailed processes as dissolution, precipitation, reduction and oxidation, salt deliquescence, general corrosion, localized (or crevice) corrosion, alteration, and solubility. **Thermal-chemical** processes include evaporation, mineral precipitation, dissolution, and effects on thermal-chemical properties.
- **Biological** (and microbiological) processes include the potential effects of microorganisms on other processes relevant to performance, such as microbial effects on chemical processes. **Thermalbiological** processes include temperature-dependent effects.
- **Transport** includes such processes as advection, diffusion, dispersion, matrix diffusion, retardation, and colloid stability and filtration. These processes may occur within the EBS, NBS, and/or Biosphere. **Thermal-transport** processes include temperature-dependent effects. Transport processes are typically strongly dependent on the other THMCBR processes and couplings.
- **Thermal** processes include only those broad-based temperature dependencies that are not coupled to other THCMBR processes.
- **Radiological** processes include the potential effects of ionizing radiation from the decay of radioactive materials on other processes potentially relevant to performance, such as chemistry. Specific radiological processes include radiolysis. As in the case of thermal effects, the radiological processes are generally addressed through their coupling with other processes that in turn could potentially affect repository performance. Radiological processes also include radiological exposure to the receptor and the resulting doses.
- **Long-Term Geologic** processes include tectonic activity, metamorphism, diapirism, subsidence, and dissolution.
- **Climatic** processes include natural effects that may produce changes in the regional and local climate.
- **Human Activities (Long Timescale)** includes human-initiated effects on the climate and the surface and subsurface THCMBR environment.
- **Other** is reserved for processes that do not fit into any of the other categories. Examples include processes related to the calculation of the dose to the receptor such as ingestion, inhalation, and exposure.

A brief description of the Events follows:

- **Nuclear Criticality** events include initiators of sequences of events or processes that could lead to configurations that have potential for criticality in the EBS or NBS. For a criticality event to occur, the appropriate combination of materials (neutron moderators, neutron absorbers, fissile materials, or isotopes) and geometric configurations favorable to criticality must exist. During design, criticality analyses are performed to demonstrate that the initial emplaced configuration of the waste form remains subcritical, even under flooded conditions. For a configuration to have potential for criticality, all of the following conditions must occur: (1) sufficient mechanical or corrosive damage to the waste package outer corrosion barrier to cause a breach, (2) presence of a moderator, i.e., water, (3) separation of fissionable material from the neutron absorber material or an absorber material selection error during the canister fabrication process, and (4) the accumulation or presence of a critical mass of fissionable material.
- **Early Failure** events include phenomena that lead to the failure of a feature or component at a time significantly faster the design basis. An example is the through-wall penetration of a waste package due to manufacturing- or handling-induced defects, at a time earlier than would be predicted by mechanistic degradation models for a defect-free waste package. Another example is the early failure of a shaft seal.
- Seismic events include seismic activity that produces vibratory ground motion or fault displacement which affects the waste packages, the EBS, and/or the natural system pathways.
- **Igneous** events include igneous intrusion intersecting the repository, volcanic eruption from a volcanic vent that intersects the repository, and/or volcanic disturbance to the natural system pathways. Igneous intrusion considers the possibility that magma, in the form of a dike, could intrude into the EBS, destroying waste packages, and exposing the waste forms for potential mobilization of radionuclides. Volcanic eruption considers that a volcanic conduit (or conduits) intersects the repository, destroys waste packages, and erupts at the land surface. The volcanic eruption disperses volcanic tephra and entrained waste under atmospheric conditions, and deposits the contaminated tephra on land surfaces where the contaminated tephra becomes subject to redistribution by soil and near surface hydrogeologic processes.
- **Human Activities (Short Timescale)** includes human intrusion events. Human intrusion is commonly addressed by a stylized calculation (typically specified by regulation) that simulates a future drilling operation in which an intruder drills a land-surface borehole that directly intersects a waste package causing a release of radionuclides subsequently transported into the natural system or up the borehole to the surface.
- Other is reserved for events that do not fit into any of the other categories. Examples include events such as meteor or comet impacts, and explosion or crashes.

To demonstrate the applicability of the FEP matrix approach, the 208 salt repository FEPs from Sevougian et al. (2012, Appendix A) were mapped to the salt repository FEP matrix shown in Figure 2-2. The mapping is shown in Table 2-1. To provide mapping to the sub-categories, some of the 208 FEPs needed to be sub-divided. This typically occurred when an original FEP was broad-based and applied to multiple features. For example, FEPs for flow and transport typically applied to most if not all the components of the engineered barriers and geosphere, and were therefore sub-divided into multiple FEPs – one for each feature. The new FEPs retained the same numbering scheme as the original FEPs - when an original FEP was sub-divided into two or more new FEPs, an "A", "B" or "C", was appended to the existing FEP number.

Given the numerous FEP sub-divisions, a revised salt repository FEP list is presented in Table 2-2. The FEPs in Table 2-2 are listed in order of the FEP matrix features, rather than in order of FEP number, and are color-coded. A light yellow background means that a FEP has retained its FEP number, with no modification. A light red background means a FEP has been sub-divided into multiple parts. A light blue background denotes a new FEP that was created to address a FEP matrix box.

2.3 Conclusions and Future Work

Section 2.2 describes the initial development and application of a FEP classification matrix to facilitate the grouping of salt repository FEPs.

The FEP classification matrix provides an organizational structure that groups all related FEPs in a single matrix box, row, or column. In addition, the categories along the Features axis of the matrix (e.g., Waste and Engineered Features, Geosphere Features, Surface Features, and System Features) have a direct correspondence with the Assessment Basis elements of the safety framework shown in Figure 1-1 (e.g., Waste and Engineered Barriers, Geosphere/Natural Barriers, Biosphere and Surface Environment, and Design, Construction, and Operations). This correspondence facilitates integration of the FEP analysis process with the development of the safety case.

Eventually, it would be useful to incorporate the FEP matrix and the individual FEPs into a relational database to promote easy searching for FEPs and associated issues. The FEP matrix categories can also be mapped to safety case elements through a database.

Table 2-1. FEP Matrix with Mapping of Salt Repository FEPs

Table 2-2. Generic Salt Repository FEP List Consistent with FEP Matrix

NOTE: text in red indicates changes identified in, or subsequent to, Sevougian et al. (2012, Appendix A)

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