

TRIBAL COLLABORATION INITIATIVE

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has established a Tribal Collaboration Initiative (TCI) that will ensure federally recognized Tribes have direct and meaningful input into DOE's consent-based siting (CBS) process for one or more federal consolidated interim storage facilities (CISFs). Establishing a TCI ensures federally recognized Tribal interests and concerns are directly communicated and accurately represented to DOE, as the agency continues developing the siting process. DOE is legally responsible for the safe management and disposition of the Nation's spent nuclear fuel (SNF) and high-level waste from defense activities and commercial power plants. DOE's management responsibilities include finding sites to temporarily store and permanently dispose of commercial SNF and ensuring SNF that storage and disposal facilities and procedures are safe for the environment and surrounding communities.

Under direction from the U.S. Congress, DOE has embarked on a project to site one or more federal CISFs for commercial SNF using a consent-based process. DOE is in Stage 1 (Planning and Capacity Building) of a 3-stage process¹. To build capacity for community engagement in future stages in the CBS process, DOE has funded 12 consortia that will provide input into the development of the siting process. While some of these consortia may have a Tribal component to their teams or activities, none were established to exclusively represent Tribal interests and concerns. Therefore, DOE established the TCI led by federally recognized Tribes to provide more comprehensive input from Tribes into the CBS process and inform and collaborate with other Tribal partners interested in the CBS process.

The objectives of the TCI are to:

- Inform DOE's CBS process on issues and concerns relative to the sovereignty of federally recognized Tribal Governments and their communities
- Ensure the CBS process includes provisions that recognize and protect rights and resources outside of Tribal reservation boundaries (i.e., Treaty protected rights)

¹ U.S. Department of Energy Consent-Based Siting Process for Federal Consolidated Interim Storage of Spent Nuclear Fuel | Department of Energy

The TCI's work consists of three phases. Phase 1 began in July 2024 and is expected to complete in 6 months with subsequent phases following this timeframe. Phase 1 focuses on the development of a project plan to include identification of federally recognized Tribal governments and Tribal representatives; development of an engagement and outreach process; and research of past Tribal-DOE interactions.

In Phases 2 and 3, the TCI will interact with federally recognized Tribes to solicit feedback regarding community decision-making, build capacity, identify concerns related to off-reservation impacts, and map Tribal values, among other objectives. The goal is to empower Tribes to shape the process that DOE will use to site a federal CISF to ensure it recognizes, considers, and includes Tribal rights, concerns, and interests.

Once established and operational, the TCI will seek input from Tribes impacted by:

- Operating and decommissioned commercial nuclear power plant sites
- DOE Environmental Management clean-up sites and research facilities as appropriate
- The proposed repository at Yucca Mountain
- Potential transportation routes for future DOE transport of SNF and/or high-level radioactive waste to federal storage and/or disposal facilities.

These are the Tribes most informed about nuclear facilities and the most able to provide substantive input into DOE's CBS process. TCI will be able to apply the experience and insights gained from working with these tribes to discussions with other Tribes that may be interested in hosting a federal CISF. The TCI will be designed to involve Tribal partners (elected officials, Tribal members, Tribal organizations); build mutually respectful relationships; and develop and execute mutual learning pathways regarding Tribal decision-making processes for CBS, the meeting of the federal government's nuclear waste management obligations, and siting considerations for nuclear waste management facilities.

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