



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

February 11, 2000

Students in Kathy Traugott's Class
The Little School
2812 - 116th Northeast
Bellevue, WA 98004

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO YOUR NUCLEAR POWER LEAKS REPORT

Dear Colin, Aaron, Chris, Gordon and Brian:

Thank you very much for your January 7, 2000, report titled "Nuclear Power Leaks." I think the report was well done. You must have spent a lot of time to conduct the research. My guess is that you have a good science teacher at school and supportive parents at home. Your cooperative efforts and team work to prepare the final report are definitely commendable. Team work is important at schools and at work places, as you will find out later in your life. In fact, this is precisely how we at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) carry out our mission.

The NRC's mission is, in part, to ensure public health and safety and protection of the environment in the use of nuclear materials in the United States. We at the NRC take your safety and that of the public seriously. That's why NRC maintains a robust regulatory program to ensure nuclear safety. As a part of that regulatory program, NRC stations full-time resident inspectors at every nuclear power reactor and some nuclear fuel processing facilities in this country. These highly trained resident inspectors are NRC's "eyes and ears" in detecting and reporting inadvertent radioactive releases (leaks) from these nuclear facilities. Over the years, they have done an excellent job and we are very proud of the professionalism and dedication displayed by the men and women employed by NRC.

You are right that high level waste will remain radioactive for many years to come. Obviously the safe operations of a geological repository where the high level waste will eventually rest is critical to the safety of the general public. Another government agency, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is responsible for developing and operating the repository and is currently studying a site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. NRC is working closely with DOE to carefully evaluate the long term (more than 10,000 years) safety aspects of a repository at the Yucca Mountain site.

Your report correctly pointed out that the volume of the liquid high level waste could be reduced by a process called vitrification. DOE stores appreciable amounts of liquid high level waste at the other side of your state, in a place called the Hanford Reservation near Richland, Washington. You may be pleased to know that DOE plans to use the vitrification process to treat the Hanford liquid high level waste in the next few years. In the mean time, NRC is assisting DOE in developing its regulatory program for the Hanford vitrification project.

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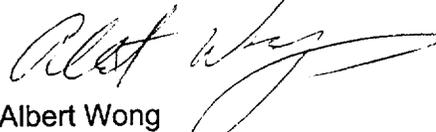
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Sincerely,



Albert Wong
Tank Waste Remediation Systems Section
Special Projects Branch
Division of Fuel Cycle Safety
and Safeguards
Office of Nuclear Material
and Safeguards

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Michael F. Weber, Director
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