

EDO Principal Correspondence Control

FROM: DUE: 04/26/00

EDO CONTROL: G20000196
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FINAL REPLY:

Senator Tom Harkin

TO:

Chairman Meserve

FOR SIGNATURE OF :

** PRI **

CRC NO: 00-0257

Chairman

DESC:

Potassium Iodide (KI)

ROUTING:

Travers
Paperiello
Miraglia
Norry
Blaha
Burns
Collins, NRR
Cyr, OGC

DATE: 04/14/00

ASSIGNED TO:

IRO

CONTACT:

Congel

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS OR REMARKS:

Ref. G980097.

Template: SECY-017

E-RIDS: SECY-01

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1502

April 10, 2000

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE
APPROPRIATIONS
SMALL BUSINESS
LABOR AND HUMAN
RESOURCES

The Honorable Richard A. Meserve
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Chairman Meserve:

On February 13, 1998, I wrote to the then Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson, to commend the NRC for its proposal to fund the purchase by any state of the antidote potassium iodide (KI). In case of a severe nuclear accident, KI, if administered quickly, would protect the general population against thyroid cancer and other diseases. Thus in 1998 I expressed concern that the proposal did not go far enough, and urged that the NRC require stockpiling, as Commissioners Diaz and McGaffigan had proposed.

I am very disappointed that the NRC seems to have retreated even from its earlier modest proposal. The NRC's actions in the intervening two years are grounds for serious concern. In that time, I am told, the NRC has: (1) first reaffirmed and then repudiated its commitment to provide potassium iodide for any state requesting it; (2) issued an "assessment" of the safety and efficacy of KI, and then had to withdraw it after its grave deficiencies were pointed out by state health departments and others; (3) continued to delay the adoption of the new federal policy on potassium iodide, unanimously approved by the entire Federal Radiological Preparedness Coordinating Committee in 1996; and (4) engaged in bureaucratic battle with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which continues to support the 1996 federal policy.

Local stockpiling of KI is an inexpensive and effective measure that for a few million dollars would help protect Americans against thyroid diseases from nuclear accidents. The principal beneficiaries of KI, in an actual emergency, will be young children. If stockpiles of KI are not readily available, some of those children can be expected to develop thyroid cancer, a sometimes fatal illness. Yet the NRC persists in ignoring the recommendations of the federal coordinating committee and in advocating regional stockpiles, an approach that FEMA believes will not work because the KI tablets could not be distributed quickly enough.

Over the past eleven years the NRC has spent more time, effort, and money pondering KI than it would take simply to buy enough tablets for the whole country. Meanwhile our children remain unprotected. It is time to act. I urge you to start heeding FEMA's expertise and to start funding state stockpiles of KI now.

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and please keep me informed of your progress in making potassium iodide tablets available to all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Harkin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Harkin
United States Senator

TH/lwu

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1502

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Tom Harkin

U.S.S.

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