

No. 94-78
RELEASE
Tel. 301-504-2240
13, 1994)

FOR IMMEDIATE

(Friday, May

NRC WILL NOT RECOMMEND A CHANGE IN FEDERAL POLICY
REGARDING STOCKPILING OF POTASSIUM IODIDE

After an extensive reassessment, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will not be recommending a change in Federal policy on distribution of potassium iodide near nuclear power plants. Current Federal policy, which was formulated in 1985 by an umbrella group of about 15 Federal agencies, recommends the stockpiling or distribution of potassium iodide during emergencies for persons who are assisting with emergency actions and institutionalized persons, but does not recommend predistribution or stockpiling for the general public.

If taken immediately before or at the time of exposure resulting from a serious nuclear accident, potassium iodide can be an effective means of blocking the uptake of radioactive iodine by the human thyroid. However, any significant release of radioactive material would also include radioactive elements other than iodine for which potassium iodide would not provide protection.

The NRC believes that in the event of a serious accident, evacuation is by far the best response. But the Commission said it would not object if the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the states or local authorities wish to develop and support a potassium iodide program. Two states currently maintain potassium iodide stockpiles.

All four Commissioners agreed that the circumstances which would call for the availability of potassium iodide are "very remote," and that the cost of purchasing a KI stockpile for all those living within a five-mile radius of nuclear power plants is relatively low.

In the absence of a clear-cut regulatory justification, however, the Commissioners did not agree among themselves to recommend a change to existing Federal policy. Thus that policy, which neither encourages nor discourages state or local governments choosing to stockpile the drug for the use of the general public, remains in effect. Commissioner Kenneth C.

Rogers said that in his view, for the use of potassium iodide by state or local governments to be a viable option, it would be "prudent" for the U.S. government to assure the availability of a supply of the drug.

#