

September 13, 2000

Ms. Mary Lampert
148 Washington Street
Duxbury, MA 02332

Dear Ms. Lampert:

The issues raised in your letter of July 27, 2000, concerning potassium iodide (KI) are being considered by the Commission in its deliberations on a final rule that would amend its emergency planning regulations to require consideration of the use of KI as a supplemental action for protection of the public. We have had the benefit of extensive public comments as we resolve the final text of the rule.

As I stated on the talk show "Public Interest" that aired on July 26, 2000, early evacuation is the single most effective protective action against a large release of radioactive material. Evacuation can preclude large radiation doses to the public from all radionuclides, can protect all organs, and can be effective for all pathways by which dose is delivered, if evacuation is accomplished before evacuees are exposed to a large radioactive release. Therefore, when there is a potential of a large radioactive release, the primary emergency response objective, as determined by State and local governments, is to evacuate everyone, including children, before they are exposed to any radiation. Nonetheless, the Commission has recognized that there are circumstances in which KI would be useful. These circumstances include any in which an evacuation might not be completed before arrival of the radioactive plume. Indeed, for those who are likely to be sheltered (for example, nuclear plant workers and persons in nearby hospitals or prisons), the use of KI is already included in emergency plans.

Your letter may reflect some misunderstanding of the NRC role. In the event of a nuclear power plant emergency, States and local governments have primary responsibility for implementing off-site protective actions for their citizens, such as evacuation, sheltering, administration of KI, some other protective action, or a combination of these. Thus, a local government, such as the town of Duxbury, certainly has the option to decide to stockpile KI for its citizens and to establish procedures for its use in the event of a nuclear power plant accident. The rulemaking now before the Commission would require exactly such consideration of the use of KI by State emergency officials.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Richard A. Meserve