UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
REGION II
SAM NUNN ATLANTA FEDERAL CENTER
61 FORSYTH STREET SW SUITE 23T85
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-8931

September 6, 2000

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Plant Protection and Quarantine
ATTN: Bill Newton
1270 Woolman Place
Atlanta, GA 30354

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN RESPONSE TO SUSPECTED RADIOLOGICALLY CONTAMINATED VEGETATION SAMPLES

Dear Mr. Newton:

On August 11, 2000, we received a request from John Jensen, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Radiation Safety Officer, to assist a local USDA office with a suitcase containing vegetation samples that they suspected may be radiologically contaminated. The suitcase had been seized by the USDA Plant Protection and Quarantine office at the Atlanta Hartsfield International Airport on July 25, 2000, because the individual who was bringing the suitcase into the country did not have the proper USDA permits for entry of the vegetation samples. The USDA staff member who seized and quarantined the suitcase became suspicious that the samples may be radiologically contaminated and obtained a radiation survey meter to check the suitcase for radiation. After survey of the suitcase, the staff member was concerned that he had detected elevated levels of radiation from the vegetation samples and that these levels may be hazardous. Region II agreed to assist the USDA by sending two inspectors to the Atlanta Hartsfield International Airport to survey the suitcase. Mr. Sidney Simonton of the Georgia Division of Natural Resources Office, Environmental Protection Division and Mr. Paul Wagner of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also went to the site and assisted with the survey.

Mr. José Díaz Vélez and I surveyed the suitcase and its contents with three different radiation detection survey meters (see enclosure). We detected no gamma radiation from the surface of the suitcase or from the approximately 200 individually bagged vegetation samples it contained. Some levels of radiation above background levels were detected from the surface of the suitcase and some of the vegetation samples with the other two meters. Based upon the results obtained, it appeared that four of the vegetation samples were contaminated with a beta radiation emitting contaminant at levels ranging from two to six times above background levels. These low levels of radiation are not considered hazardous, would not cause any exposures exceeding regulatory limits, and as demonstrated to the USDA staff members present, dropped to background levels when measured a few inches from the vegetation samples. We also obtained contamination smears from the outside and inside of the suitcase and returned these samples to our counting laboratory for analysis. The samples were counted for alpha and beta emitting radiation contamination in a gas proportional laboratory instrument, but none was detected.

If you have any questions regarding this letter or the survey, please call me at (404) 562-4731.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Jay L. Henson, Chief
Materials Licensing/Inspection Branch 2
Division of Nuclear Materials Safety

Enclosure: As stated

cc w/encl:
Georgia Department of
Natural Resources
ATTN: Mr. Tom Hill, Manager
205 Butler Street
East Tower, E-1152
Atlanta, GA 30334

U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency, Region 4
ATTN: Mr. Paul Wagner
61 Forsyth St., S. W.
Atlanta, GA 30303

OFFICE	RII:DNMS						
SIGNATURE	/RA/						
NAME	JDiaz						
DATE	9/5/00	9/ /2000	9/ /2000	9/ /2000	9/ /2000	9/ /2000	9/ /2000
E-MAIL COPY?	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO	YES NO

OFFICIAL RECORD COPY DOCUMENT NAME: C:\USDALTR2.wpd

RESULTS OF VEGETATION SAMPLE SURVEY
USDA FACILITY AT ATLANTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
JULY 25, 2000

	Ludlum Model 19 (microrem/hour)	Eberline Model E-120 (counts/minute)	Eberline Model E-600 (counts/minute)
Background	15	40	250
Suitcase Surface	13 - 18	40 - 100	150 - 400
Vegetation Samples with detectable levels of contamination	13 - 18	80 - 200	500 - 1650

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

1. Ludlum Model 19, Micro R Meter (Serial No. 91555, calibrated July 21, 2000) [detects gamma radiation]

2. Eberline Model E-120 Geiger Counter with a Model No. HP-260 “pancake” geiger-mueller detector (Serial No. 032195, calibrated July 24, 2000) [detects alpha, beta and gamma radiation]

3. Eberline Model E-600 survey meter (Serial No. 01876, calibrated November 12, 1999) with an alpha/beta scintillation detector (Serial No. 00893, calibrated November 11, 1999) [operated in the beta radiation detection mode]

Enclosure