

September 27, 2000

MEMORANDUM TO: Sandra Wastler, Section Chief
Performance Assessment Section
Environmental and Performance Assessment Branch
Division of Waste Management, NMSS

FROM: Rateb (Boby) Abu Eid
Performance Assessment Section
Environmental and Performance Assessment Branch
Division of Waste Management, NMSS

SUBJECT: FOREIGN TRIP REPORT

Attached is a summary report of a trip to Berlin, Germany, September 2-7, 2000. The purpose of the trip was to attend the "International Conference on Radioactive Waste Disposal, DisTec 2000" organized by the German Federal Office of Radiation Protection (BfS), the German Agency for Construction and Operation of Repositories (DBE), the European Commission on Radioactive Waste Disposal (OEDC/NEA), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The conference was a useful forum to keep staff informed of recent progress in disposal technologies developed by leading industrial nations. The conference was also useful in exchanging views regarding repository selection, confirmation, and licensing. The results of the demonstration projects presented at the conference (e.g., the U.S. Waste Isolation Pilot Plant and the Sweden SKB Disposal Demonstration Project) were of particular importance. International cooperation and socio-political aspects of radioactive waste management were also discussed by representatives of different industrial nations. Examples of these aspects include the long-term retrieval of radioactive waste in the light of public debate, the long-term storage of spent fuel, and regulating disposal of naturally occurring radioactive materials.

The conference was quite successful; therefore, the organizers decided to convene a follow-up conference on radioactive waste disposal at the same place in Berlin, in 2002. I recommend highly that the NRC staff participate in the 2002 conference.

Attachment: Trip Report

cc: T. Essig

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TRIP REPORT

OFFICIAL TRAVELER: Rateb (Boby) Abu-Eid

TRAVEL TO: Berlin, Germany

DATES: September 2 - 7, 2000

OFFICE/DIVISION: NMSS/Division of Waste Management

CONFERENCE TITLE: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RADIOACTIVE WASTE DISPOSAL, DISPOSAL TECHNOLOGIES AND CONCEPTS 2000 - DisTec 2000

ORGANIZED BY: THE GERMAN FEDERAL OFFICE OF RADIATION PROTECTION, THE GERMAN AGENCY FOR CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF REPOSITORIES, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON RADIOACTIVE WASTE DISPOSAL, AND THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE:

The "International Conference on Radioactive Waste Disposal, Disposal Technologies and Concepts 2000 - DisTec 2000," hereafter referred to "the conference," was convened during the week of September 3, 2000, in Berlin, Germany. The conference was coordinated by the German Federal Office of Radiation Protection (BfS), the German Agency for Construction and Operation of Repositories (DBE), the European Commission on Radioactive Waste Disposal (OECD/NEA), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Over 350 participants representing 22 countries attended the conference (Attachment 1). U.S. representatives at the conference included members of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Department of Energy, the Department of State, National Laboratories, and U.S. private consultants and industries.

The conference started with DBE and BfS welcoming addresses followed by an official opening of the conference by Mrs. Simone Probst; Undersecretary of the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU). Mrs. Probst represented Mr. Jurgen Tritton, Minister of BMU and Patron of the conference. In her presentation, Ms. Probst outlined the present German situation regarding the Federal (German) Government plans to phase-out nuclear power and the immediate need for radioactive waste management and disposal. Mrs. Probst indicated that within the framework of its waste management policy, the German government pursues the concept of disposing of waste in deep geological formations, with all type of radioactive wastes being safely disposed in one final repository isolated from the biosphere. Mr. D. Taylor and Mr. A. Gonzales presented key note addresses of the European Commission OECD/NEA and the IAEA respectively. The two speakers outlined positions and opinions of OECD/NEA and IAEA regarding radioactive waste management and disposal. The speakers emphasized that the public at large, and their political representatives, are becoming more aware that sensible approaches are needed to the safe management of

radioactive waste. Moreover, they echoed public opinion that scientists need to provide technically sound options with public participation in the decision-making process.

The technical papers presented at the conference (Attachment 2) addressed issues pertaining to: international cooperation for repositories; site selection criteria, methodologies, and procedures; repositories for low-, intermediate-, and high-level waste; disposal options for naturally occurring radioactive materials; repository safety; and backfilling and sealing of repositories. For example, technical details were presented on the status of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico; the Yucca Mountain site in Nevada; and the Gorleben site in Northern Germany. Other detailed topics included the naturally occurring radioactive materials, repository long-term safety, gas generation, and waste retrieval. The conference ended with a round-table discussion of the public and socio-political aspects of radioactive waste disposal followed by a concluding panel conference summary and closing remarks.

The conference was a valuable mean to keep staff abreast of international activities and decisions regarding repository site selection, confirmation, and construction. The conference was also a useful forum for discussing technical issues and associated progress in the area of radioactive waste disposal technologies. The staff has benefitted from the extensive research results presented at the conference and the project implementation efforts that have been reported by representatives of the leading industrial nations.

Attachments:

1. List of Participants
2. Titles of Papers Presented at the Conference