

October 16, 2000

The Honorable Adlah "Foncie" Donastorg, Jr.  
Chairman, Committee on Planning  
and Environmental Protection  
Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
Capitol Building, Charlotte Amalie  
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00804

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to follow-up on former Chairman Shirley Ann Jackson's letter to you dated June 29, 1999. In that letter, Dr. Jackson committed to keep you informed about Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) activities concerning the inappropriate firing of depleted uranium (DU) ammunition on the Naval Range on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, that occurred on February 19, 1999.

Our efforts over the past year were directed towards ensuring that the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps maintain adequate controls so that incidents such as this do not happen again. We also want to ensure that the Navy's DU recovery activities are completed safely.

The NRC staff has reviewed the joint Navy-Marine Corps incident investigation and proposed corrective actions, and determined that they are adequate to prevent reoccurrences. Cleanup operations were delayed, but the Navy is now proceeding to recover the DU penetrators. This will take some time to accomplish safely, due to the presence of unexploded ammunition.

The NRC staff recently conducted independent inspections and radiation surveys on Vieques Island in cooperation with the Puerto Rico Department of Health. Our surveys demonstrated that radioactive contamination is not present beyond the immediate soil near the DU penetrators. Therefore, we are confident that the DU does not constitute a radiological health hazard to members of the public on Vieques Island or the U.S. Virgin Islands. The three inspection reports documenting our findings are enclosed.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Richard A. Meserve

Enclosures:

1. Inspection report dtd 4/19/00
2. Inspection report dtd 7/13/00
3. Inspection report dtd 9/28/00

cc w/encls: The Honorable Carlos Romero-Barcelo