

November 16, 2000

Ms. Laurel Schillke
Doctor of Oriental Medicine
1217 Coal Avenue SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106-5242

Dear Ms. Schillke:

Recently you sent a letter to President Clinton stating your concerns about controlling radioactive materials from entering the marketplace, incinerator, landfills, or other sites. The White House has asked the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to respond to your concerns.

The NRC has a set of regulations that control operations at a variety of facilities that use radioactive materials, including hospitals and clinics, universities, power plants, and manufacturing facilities. The intent of our regulations is to ensure that these facilities use radioactive materials in a manner that protects public health and safety. These regulations also consider potential economic impacts on consumers and licensees.

NRC's regulations presently include various requirements for control of radioactive materials and prevention of their entry into the marketplace. Currently, we are engaged in a process of considering how best to control those materials that have very low amounts of, or no, radioactivity. As part of this process, we have sought public input in several ways. On June 30, 1999, we published a paper on alternatives for controlling this material and requested public comment. Following that, we held public meetings at four locations around the country during the Fall of 1999 and in May 2000 to discuss the paper and hear public comment.

We have received a large number of public comments, both in writing and verbally at the public meetings. Based on those comments, we have decided to defer a decision on whether to prepare a regulation on control of solid materials, and have instead requested that the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) conduct a study on possible alternatives for control of slightly contaminated materials. The NAS study is expected to take 18 months to complete. In the meantime, we are developing further technical information and will seek further public input before making a decision in this area.

To put into some perspective our preliminary thinking in this area, the June 30, 1999, paper suggested possible alternative radiation dose criteria of 0.1, 1.0, or 10 millirem per year (mrem/yr) above natural background. By way of comparison:

- These levels are smaller than exposures from naturally radioactive elements in food, soil, building materials, and cosmic rays, which total about 100 mrem/yr. The natural background levels can vary by as much as 40-50 mrem/yr between what a person would receive in Eastern coastal areas compared to mountainous areas in Colorado;
- These levels are in the range of what other organizations that set health standards consider to be safe when setting standards. For example, the National Council on

Radiation Protection and Measurements considers 1.0 mrem/yr to be a level below which doses have negligible risk associated with them.

Information about our current efforts in this area, including the text of the June 30, 1999, paper and other NRC documents, as well as public comments received to date, summaries and transcripts of the public meetings, and opportunities for further public comment, is available on NRC's web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/NMSS/IMNS/controlsolids.html>. The NRC web site can be accessed, using internet services, on computers at home or available at local schools or libraries.

I want to assure you that any decision that we make with respect to the control of solid materials, including whether to proceed with rulemaking in this area, will be based on a full evaluation of the health and environmental impacts of all alternative approaches, as well as related economic impacts, and consideration of all issues in an open public forum.

Sincerely,

/RA/ signed by J. Greeves, Acting Director
For W. Kane
William F. Kane, Director
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards

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