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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

February 28, 1996

MEMORANDUM TO: Chairman Jackson
Commissioner Rogers
Commissioner Dicus

FROM: James M. Taylor *[Signature]*
Executive Director for Operations

SUBJECT: CONSOLIDATION OF HIGH-LEVEL WASTE ACTIVITIES IN NMSS

This memorandum is to inform you of actions taken and planned for the Commission's High-Level Waste (HLW) Program in response to the significant reduction in the HLW appropriation. As you are aware, NRC's HLW budget was reduced from \$22 million in FY 1995 to \$11 million in FY 1996, and the FY 1997 President's Budget requests \$14 million. The HLW Management Board, made up of managers from the Offices of Nuclear Regulatory Research (RES) and Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards (NMSS) and the Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses (CNWRA), evaluated all ongoing activities being conducted by the staff and contractors and determined which activities were necessary and could be supported in a reduced program. The Board determined that of the eleven current HLW Research Projects, four could be supported; three at the CNWRA, and one at the University of Arizona. For the remaining projects some high-priority activities would continue to be funded as part of technical assistance projects. The Board also recommended that in this severely constrained resource environment, efficiencies could be achieved in consolidating management of reduced research activities under NMSS.

The Directors of RES and NMSS agree with the Board's recommendations and that the most cost effective way to manage the HLW Program was to consolidate these activities in NMSS. Although I recognize the value of staff dedicated to overseeing research and the contributions made in this area by the RES staff, NRC can no longer afford the costs of running the HLW program between the two offices and still maintain a minimum acceptable level of technical expertise within the Commission and at the CNWRA. The only exception is that RES will manage all ongoing work at the University of Arizona (~\$600,000.00). Since this work is scheduled to be completed next year and RES has managed it since its inception, RES will continue to manage it, to bring it to an orderly close. RES will continue to oversee and conduct a generic research program focusing on radionuclide behavior and transport in the environment. The results of this RES work could be applied to NMSS activities in the following areas: radionuclide inventories and source terms for mill tailings stabilization and site decommissioning; flow and transport models; monitoring strategies for groundwater and airborne contamination; long-term materials

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integrity of spent fuel storage containers; and general performance assessment methodology to support licensing decisions for decommissioning, mill tailings stabilization, and spent fuel storage. Much of the work will be conducted in-house, supplemented by appropriate laboratory and field investigations. This generic research program will be melded with ongoing decommissioning activities over the next few years and RES is currently planning to fund these activities at a level of approximately \$2 million by FY 1998.

This consolidation is not expected to result in any changes to the organizational structure of NMSS or RES. In NMSS it results only in the additional responsibility of managing three research tasks at the CNWRA. There will be no change in full-time equivalent positions. In RES the Waste Management Branch will no longer be involved in HLW activities once the HLW work at the University of Arizona is closed out. Because of the developing program of generic research on examining radionuclide behavior in the environment, only one or two staff persons are expected to be transferred to other RES branches. Any transferred staff will continue to work in their areas of technical expertise. The Office Labor-Management Partnership Committees have been appropriately informed.

This consolidation of HLW activities in NMSS is consistent with my September 1, 1995, transmittal "NRC FY 1996 Recommended Budget for Meeting Congressional Appropriation Committee Reductions." I should note that in addition to this consolidation approach, in response to budget cuts, NMSS has already transferred eight staff out of the HLW repository area and has initiated actions to reduce FY96 support to the CNWRA by approximately 20 percent.

Unless directed otherwise by the Commission, this consolidation of the HLW program management will become final within ten days from the date of this memo.

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