

June 10, 2002

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Byrd:

I am responding to your letter of April 8, 2002, regarding Mr. Wayne Bartley's interest and the interest of UCAR Carbon Company (UCAR) in the uses of graphite in nuclear waste vitrification and advanced nuclear reactors. UCAR representatives recently provided a presentation to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) at the Nuclear Materials Safety and Security Colloquium on Advanced Reactor Graphite Technology. The staff found the presentation informative. Regarding waste vitrification, NRC does conduct independent audit reviews of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE)'s repository activities. However, DOE has the responsibility for proposing and assessing the various attributes of alternatives to waste processing. Appropriate DOE contacts in this technical area are listed in the enclosure to this letter.

In your letter, you refer to a nuclear "bubble" reactor that, from the description provided, we are assuming refers to the pebble bed modular reactor (PBMR), which uses graphite. The NRC's role regarding reactor design is to evaluate license applications for safety and conformance to regulations. For example, NRC recently conducted a limited pre-application review of the PBMR technology. However, in NRC's regulatory process, a reactor license applicant would be responsible for choosing specific components and vendors. Information regarding a potential vendor's need for specific products is best obtained directly from such a vendor.

For further information on these efforts, please contact Dennis Rathbun, Director, Office of Congressional Affairs.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

William D. Travers  
Executive Director  
for Operations

Enclosure:  
DOE Contacts for Uses of Graphite in Nuclear Waste Processing

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Enclosure