

December 30, 2002

The Honorable Richard A. Meserve  
Chairman  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, DC 20555-0001

SUBJECT: REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THE U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY  
COMMISSION'S WASTE SAFETY RESEARCH PROGRAM

Dear Chairman Meserve:

The Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste reviews the activities of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in nuclear waste safety research and the high-level waste (HLW) technical assistance program. At the 139<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ACNW, the Committee heard presentations on the status of work being conducted on the Radionuclide Transport Research Program by the Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research (RES) and in NRC-sponsored waste-related technical assistance programs being carried out at the Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analysis (CNWRA). These presentations addressed progress made since the comprehensive review conducted by the ACNW in FY 2002. The ACNW's letter of March 22, 2002, to Richard A. Meserve, Chairman, NRC, presented the results of this FY 2002 assessment of the quality of the research and technical assistance and made recommendations for future work.

The ACNW believes that the RES program is being conducted in response to user needs and is producing quality work. Progress has been made in developing collaborative arrangements with other Government organizations. It is important for RES to continue to focus its work and to leverage its limited resources. RES is in the process of completing an external peer review of its nuclear waste-related programs. We believe that this is a positive step toward incorporating a decision analysis framework for setting research priorities. We will continue to follow RES work in this area.

The technical assistance work at the CNWRA is very broad in scope and covers areas important to HLW storage at the proposed Yucca Mountain repository, as well as other waste safety-related NRC responsibilities. Most of this effort is on the technical issues associated with the Yucca Mountain repository. This work continues to be well managed, of very high quality, and focused on important issues.

Finally, the ACNW believes that RES and CNWRA have made progress in responding to the Committee's FY 2002 recommendations to use a risk-informed approach for establishing research priorities.

Sincerely,

**/RA/**

George M. Hornberger  
Chairman