



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

March 6, 1997

Mr. Robert R. Loux  
Executive Director  
Agency for Nuclear Projects  
Nuclear Waste Project Office  
Capitol Complex  
Carson City, Nevada 89710

Dear Mr. Loux:

I am writing in response to your letter of January 24, 1997, expressing concern about the recent transfer of U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff qualified in quality assurance (QA) from the high-level waste (HLW) program. In your letter, you interpret this transfer as an elimination of the NRC QA oversight of the high-level waste program. You urge the NRC to reevaluate the assignment of QA personnel to the HLW program because, in your view, the NRC has eliminated any effective form of oversight in an important area.

First, I disagree with your statement that NRC has elected to essentially eliminate oversight of the DOE QA program. The NRC has provided, currently does provide, and will continue to provide oversight of QA in all radiological programs because, as your letter indicates, QA oversight is a fundamental component of protecting the public health and safety. The NRC did experience a budget reduction in the HLW area, which required a restructuring and a focusing of staff efforts in all areas, including QA. Our dedicated QA staff in HLW was reduced to one person who also had some collateral duties; but he could call for assistance as required in specific circumstances. However, it did not result in eliminating our QA efforts.

In a parallel action not related to the HLW budget reduction, the Agency experienced an immediate need to transfer qualified QA staff with a material background to a project involving an existing facility actually handling radioactive waste. The person assigned to the HLW QA effort met the requirements necessary for this immediate Agency concern and was transferred. I knew at that time that I would need to fill that important vacancy and have initiated efforts to achieve that objective, but it may still take several additional months to find the right staff, appropriately qualified in QA.

In the meantime, this action does not mean that the NRC has abandoned or eliminated its focus on QA. As your letter indicates, John Thoma is the first line supervisor responsible for HLW QA issues. Working for John is Bill Belke, one of the two senior NRC On-Site Representatives assigned to the Yucca Mountain site. Bill is qualified in QA and has been assigned a collateral duty of monitoring HLW QA efforts at Yucca Mountain and advising management on QA matters in general. If John or Bill requires additional assistance, on a case-specific basis, the need will be justified through management and additional Agency resources will be assigned as necessary and appropriate. In addition, the technical leads for the NRC Key Technical Issues will monitor QA trends in their area of technical expertise and will report quarterly through their management to the NRC HLW

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NRC management will continue, as they have done in the past, to bring appropriate concerns to DOE management for action.

Additionally, DOE is responsible for demonstrating, in any license application for a HLW repository, that it will adequately protect the public health and safety. As part of this demonstration, DOE must have an effective QA program, which includes an appropriate QA organization and an effective program implementation by the line management. NRC oversight will be an audit function. Where the NRC audit indicates a problem exists, the responsibility is on DOE to review their entire program for similar concerns. I personally have emphasized the importance of a strong and viable QA program in both management meetings with DOE and direct individual communications with DOE management.

In conclusion, I understand your concern about recent NRC personnel decisions in the HLW area. I am taking actions to obtain at least one additional staff qualified in QA for the HLW area, but this action may take months to complete. I appreciate your concerns, however NRC will not eliminate oversight responsibilities in the HLW program in the important area of QA.

Sincerely,

John T. Greeves, Director  
Division of Waste Management  
Office of Nuclear Material Safety  
and Safeguards

cc: R. Milner, OCRWM

C. Johnson, State of Nevada

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DOCUMENT NAME: S:\DWM\PAHL\JOT\STATE.QA

OFC	PAHL*	E	PAHL*	E	OGC*	E	DWM		DWM	
NAME	JThoma/kv <i>JOT</i>		JAustin <i>3076-5A</i>		BReamer		MFederline		JGreeves	
DATE	2/18/96	H	2/20/96	H	3/3/96	H	1/96		3/6/96	

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In conclusion, I understand your concern about recent NRC personnel decisions in the HLW area. I am taking actions to obtain at least one additional staff qualified in QA for the HLW area, but this action may take months to complete. However, the NRC personnel decisions do not, under any circumstances, indicate a desire by the NRC to eliminate oversight responsibilities in the HLW program in the area of QA.

Sincerely,

John T. Greeves, Director  
Division of Waste Management  
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DOCUMENT NAME: S:\DWM\PAHL\JOT\STATE.QA

OFC	PAHL	E	PAHL		DWM		DWM			
NAME	JThoma/kv	507	JAustin		MFederline		JGreeves			
DATE	2 / 18 / 96	H	2 / 20 / 96		1 / 96		1 / 96		1 / 96	

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2/24/97

BL 2/20

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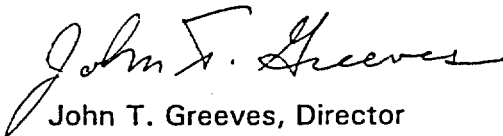
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