



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

December 19, 1996

Dr. Paul W. Pomeroy, Chairman
Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555-0001

Dear Dr. Pomeroy:

I am responding to your letter of November 20, 1996, to the Chairman on 1997 priority issues for the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste (henceforth, The Committee). In that letter, the Committee describes the criteria used in its annual prioritization process and the resulting priority issues for 1997.

The priority issues identified by the Committee are also important to the staff. In general, we believe that the Committee's emphasis on these issues will support the staff programs for the high-level waste repository, low-level waste, decommissioning, and spent fuel storage. However, we would like to point out that the FY 1997 budget reductions affecting the high-level waste repository program resulted in eliminating contractor support for three of ten key technical issues. Two of these issues--repository design/thermal mechanical effects and container life/source term--are central to the Committee's repository design issue. For these two issues the staff will be limited to monitoring the U.S. Department of Energy's activities and addressing key regulatory issues within the constraints of remaining staff resources. As might be expected, interactions in these areas with the Committee may be limited and any requests would need to be carefully evaluated. As you are aware, however, some of the Committee's repository design subissues, such as coupled processes and thermal effects on flow, are being addressed by activities under key technical issues not affected by the budget reductions.

The Committee's priorities and the criteria used to identify them will help the staff understand the general focus of the Committee's activities during 1997. The staff agrees that current events will determine the specific course of the Committee's reviews. In the Committee's February meeting we propose that the informal discussion with the Division Director consist of both the Director of the Division of Waste Management and the Director of the Spent Fuel Project Office giving overviews of the major activities that the staff may need to discuss with the Committee during 1997. We believe that these discussions will complement the Committee's letter on priorities and provide the foundation for coordinating the specific activities of the Committee and staff during the year. Careful coordination and advanced planning through established points of contact is essential for efficient use of our limited resources and for avoiding impacting completion of planned activities.

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P. Pomeroy

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The staff appreciates the Committee's information on priorities and looks forward to planning future interactions.

Sincerely,

**Original signed by
James M. Taylor**

James M. Taylor
Executive Director
for Operations

cc: Chairman Jackson
Commissioner Rogers
Commissioner Dicus
Commissioner Diaz
Commissioner McGaffigan
SECY

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OFC	DWM		NMSS		NMSS		DEDO		EDO	
NAME	MFederline*		MKnapp		CPaperbello		HThompson		JTaylor	
DATE	12/12/96		1/1/96		12/16/96		12/19/96		12/19/96	

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P. Pomeroy

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Executive Director
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cc: Chairman Jackson
Commissioner Rogers
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DATE	12/12/96	12/12/96	H	12/12/96	H	1/96	12/12/96
OFC	DWM	NMSS		NMSS		DEDO	EDO
NAME	<i>MVS</i>	MKnapp		CPaperiello		HThompson	JTaylor
DATE	12/12/96	1/96		1/96		1/96	1/96

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