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Docket No. _____

PDR

LPDR

Mr. James B. King, Editor
The Seattle Times
P. O. Box 70
Seattle, WA 98111

Distribution: _____

Dear Mr. King:

(Return to WM, 623-SS)

Please excuse this delay in responding to the April 4 request from you and Mr. Smith. It arrived just before I went on vacation.

For the most part, the article deals well with selected NRC comments on the Hanford Draft Environmental Assessment.

However, in my opinion the headline and the first two paragraphs [(1) and (2) in the enclosed clipping] seem to go beyond what NRC said. The NRC comments do not express a judgment on site suitability or site capability to isolate waste. As an independent regulatory agency, the NRC does not select sites or participate with the Department of Energy in selecting proposed sites. Instead, the comments deal with the application of DOE's siting guidelines. They focus on the factual basis that was used by DOE in making its findings on the siting guidelines. I enclose a copy of the introduction to the NRC comments which explains in more detail the scope of the comments (see marked portions of pages 2 and 3).

Two other portions of the article also contain material that, I believe, goes beyond the NRC comments. I identify these below, together with relevant paragraphs in the NRC comments. Although these examples could be viewed as an effort to put the NRC comments into layman's language, the article appears to present conclusions not contained in the NRC comments. While the reporter is certainly entitled to reach conclusions based on the NRC comments, a reader may wish to know that these conclusions are the reporter's, not NRC's.

The Seattle Times, (3) in the enclosed clipping, with reference to shaft drilling:

The NRC also says...that available technology may not be available for drilling.

NRC comments, page 96:

The recent study by Morrison-Knudsen (1985) identifies potential geologic hazards and corresponding remedial actions associated with drilling large diameter shafts at the Hanford site. Problems in drilling full size shafts at Hanford (e.g., equipment failure, high stress condition, spalling condition, and mud loss) may be more difficult to deal with than what is presented in the draft EA.

Based on the discussion above, we suggest that DOE revise statements made in the draft EA concerning the applicability of past drilling experience

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to large shaft drilling under the specific conditions at Hanford and reassess the conclusion on Siting Guideline 960.5-2-9(c)(2).

The Seattle Times, (4) in the enclosed clipping, with reference to ground-water pressure:

That greater pressure may significantly increase the speed at which waste-contaminated water could be pushed toward the surface, the NRC report suggested.

NRC comments, page 65:

These changes in heads constitute anomalies which suggest transient hydrologic responses. Downward recharge appears to be the most likely explanation for these gradient changes at depth. It is entirely possible that a downwardly-progressing change in hydraulic heads occurs in response to four decades of liquid waste disposal. In other words, heads measured near the reference repository location, and perhaps at other locations onsite, may not be representative of pre-1940 steady-state conditions. If this conclusion is correct, it may have significance with regard to the isolation potential of the layered basalts at Hanford.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide my impressions on the article.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Wright
Senior Technical Advisor
Repository Projects Branch
Division of Waste Management
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards

Enclosure:
The Seattle Times form of April 4, 1985

OFC	:WMP:mkg	:WMP	:	:	:	:	:
NAME	:RJWright	:HJMiller	:	:	:	:	:
DATE	:85/05/03	:05/3/85	:	:	:	:	: