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Dr. Colin Heath  
Director, Division of  
Waste Isolation  
Mail Stop B-107  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Washington, D.C. 20545

Dear Dr. Heath:

On June 12, 1979, Jack Martin wrote to S. Meyers about our plan to undertake assessments of selected portions of the DOE waste management program, beginning with the in-situ testing projects. Since then, some field visits have been undertaken by the NRC staff and there has been some interaction between the NRC and DOE technical staffs. All of this has been beneficial in improving our understanding of your program.

Now that we have forwarded the draft rule to the Commission, we see the need to step up the assessment activity. Also, we expect to expand the scope of our review to include, ultimately, all of DOE's field activities in high-level waste management. This includes sites with site evaluation activities, sites with in-situ testing activities, and sites with research and development support activities related to siting and design of a geologic repository. I anticipate that visits to most, if not all, these locations will be needed within the next year.

It seems to us that such a systematic review will be of mutual benefit. The NRC staff will be in an improved position to expeditiously analyze DOE's site characterization documents as they appear. The staff will be able to inform the Commission on progress of the DOE work. Finally, we will be able to express to DOE our views on whether the field activities are developing the information necessary for repository licensing. The activities reviewed during FY 1980 will be covered in an interim report to be transmitted to DOE by the end of the year.

The assessment program is centered in the High-Level Waste Technical Development Branch under Michael J. Bell. The program manager is Dr. Robert J. Wright (Telephone 427-4177). Dr. Wright will contact Carl Newton of your office within the next 10 days to discuss our information needs and to develop a mutually satisfactory schedule for site visits.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

|         |            |                            |  |
|---------|------------|----------------------------|--|
| OFFICE  | WMHT       | Original Signed by         |  |
| SURNAME | MJBell:ett | MICHAEL J. BELL            |  |
| DATE    | 5/2/80     | Michael J. Bell, Chief     |  |
|         |            | High-Level Waste Technical |  |