

January 25, 2006

Dr. Michael T. Ryan, Chairman  
Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, DC 20555-0001

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO COMMENTS ON RES-USDA RESEARCH: ESTIMATING  
GROUNDWATER RECHARGE AND EVALUATING MODEL ABSTRACTION  
TECHNIQUES

Dear Dr. Ryan:

This letter responds to your letter to the Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), dated April 27, 2005, regarding the Committee's review and recommendations on research being conducted at the Beltsville facility of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Estimating Groundwater Recharge and Evaluating Model Abstraction Techniques. In conducting its review, the Committee recognized the quality and relevance of the work and supported its continuation. The Committee also concluded that collaborating with the USDA and taking advantage of established field measurement programs is a cost-effective way to acquire data relevant to the agency's needs. The staff agrees with these conclusions and notes that this is only one of several examples in which the NRC has managed to amplify the effect of the decommissioning research program through cooperation with other agencies.

In your letter, the Committee offered two recommendations. First, the Committee encouraged the staff to develop strategies to enable the transfer of results from the USDA studies to other hydrologic environments. Because the objective of our program is to address hydrologic concerns at all sites, the NRC staff will make every effort to extract useful insights from the USDA work for application to other environments. Second, the Committee recommended coordinating this research with other similar programs, such as those conducted at the Hanford and Sandia facilities of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the Maricopa facility of the University of Arizona. Toward that end, the staff notes that the researchers from University of Arizona, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, USDA, and the NRC's Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research (RES) all participate in several working groups in another collaborative interagency effort, known as the Interagency Steering Committee on Multimedia Environmental Models. Consequently, the staff is using this Steering Committee as a mechanism to foster coordination and information exchange among these groups.

The Committee should also note that funds in support of the decommissioning research program will be greatly reduced in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007. Consequently, the NRC's Office of Nuclear Materials Safety and Safeguards and RES are working together to prioritize research needs in this area. The staff is also identifying research efforts that will contribute to effective review and assessment of environmental issues, such as potential groundwater contamination, for both operating and new reactors.

M. Ryan

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The staff appreciates the Committee's thoughtful review of its programs. We will consider the Committee's comments and recommendations as we plan and prioritize research efforts to support decommissioning and regulatory infrastructure development for operating and new reactors.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

Luis A. Reyes  
Executive Director  
for Operations

cc: Chairman Diaz  
Commissioner McGaffigan  
Commissioner Merrifield  
Commissioner Jaczko  
Commissioner Lyons  
SECY

M. Ryan

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