

July 6, 2006

The Honorable Steven A. Tolman
Senate of Massachusetts
State House, Room 511B
Boston, MA 02133-1053

Dear Senator Tolman:

I am writing regarding your recent letter to Senator John F. Kerry, concerning the General Services Administration (GSA) site in Watertown, Massachusetts. Senator Kerry requested that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) help resolve your concerns about this site, specifically, that the site poses a hazard to individuals who could venture on the site.

This site was formerly part of the U.S. Army's Watertown Arsenal and was used from 1955 through 1996 for the stabilization of depleted uranium (DU) scrap from activities at the Arsenal. Operations involved igniting DU fragments at a specific site location ("burn pit") to reduce volume, packaging the material in waste containers, and preparing shipments for offsite disposal. Contamination of soil resulted from spillage of the DU fragments and burned material during transport to and from the burn staging area.

In 1968, the parcel of property was transferred conditionally to the GSA, with the stipulation that the Army would remain responsible for site cleanup of residual radioactivity. In 1973, the Army performed cleanup of outdoor concrete surfaces to Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) unrestricted use guidelines in effect at that time, and conducted a final radiation survey. Based on the results of the survey, the AEC determined that the property was suitable for release for unrestricted use in January 1974. The GSA maintained control of the site, keeping the facility fenced and locked.

In 1981, under the U.S. Department of Energy's Formerly Utilized Site Remedial Action Program, Argonne National Laboratory (ANL) performed a review of previous site decontamination efforts and performed a radiological survey of the property that identified residual radioactivity in excess of the concentration-based guidelines used by NRC to determine if a site could be released for unrestricted use. In 1990, NRC developed the Site Decommissioning Management Plan (SDMP) to identify and resolve issues associated with the timely cleanup of contaminated sites. This site, although unlicensed by the NRC, was placed on the list because the levels of residual radioactivity, found during surveys performed by ANL, exceeded the NRC's concentration-based cleanup criteria in effect at that time. The site was also listed under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan, because of the presence of detectable quantities of residual hazardous materials, including chemicals, heavy metals, and depleted uranium.

Cleanup efforts were conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) at the site through 2003. As part of these efforts, USACE developed site-specific soil cleanup levels for DU that met not only the NRC's criteria for unrestricted use, but also met the criteria of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MADPH). It is important to note that the USACE selected the most restrictive of the three sets of criteria (MADPH's criteria) to ensure that all applicable cleanup criteria would be met at the site. To aid in developing the site-specific criteria for the site, USACE convened a panel of government officials and local stakeholders to determine the credible future use of the site. This panel included representatives of the USACE, the Army Research Laboratory, the GSA, MADPH, MADEP, the Massachusetts Metropolitan District Commission, and the town of Watertown.

After cleanup efforts were completed, NRC determined that the site met the established decommissioning criteria for the site and removed it from the SDMP list. I have enclosed a copy of the Environmental Assessment (EA) that was prepared by the NRC staff to support our release of the site. The EA discusses the cleanup of the site in more detail, the actions by NRC, MADEP, MADPH, and USACE to ensure that the site does not pose a threat to public health or the environment, and the public outreach activities we undertook to involve and inform local residents about the site and the cleanup.

NRC is unaware of any current official advisories or prohibitions for use of the site due to residual radioactivity. However, if you are aware of any official advisories regarding this site, please provide us with the information and we will review it to determine if there are any issues that NRC needs to address.

I hope that this adequately addresses your concerns. If you have any questions, please contact me at 301-415-7800.

Sincerely,

/RA by M.Federline for/

Jack R. Strosnider, Director
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards

Enclosure:
Environmental Assessment and Finding of
No Significant Impact for the General
Services Administration (ML032270339)

cc: Senator John F. Kerry

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Jack R. Strosnider, Director
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ENCLOSURE:

**Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact
for the General Services Administration
Watertown, Massachusetts Property**

ML032270339