

March 21, 2008

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Madam Chairman:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am writing to provide information on NRC's review of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) regulatory processes for the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant (WTP). The Conference Report for the Omnibus Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2008 directed the NRC to conduct this review and report its assessment and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy and the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations by the end of June 2008.

The NRC staff will review DOE regulations, requirements, orders, and guidance for the Hanford WTP from the perspective of the NRC regulatory framework, which applies to commercial facilities. This evaluation will include a review of areas such as human capital (staffing levels and technical expertise), DOE's approach to problem solving, and DOE plans for a transition from construction to operation of the WTP.

The NRC staff's review will focus on safety and environmental programs and activities specific to the WTP. To accommodate time and resource constraints, the NRC staff will not conduct a license review, a detailed design review, an audit of DOE's implementation of its own requirements, or an assessment of security threat or vulnerability.

In February 2008, NRC staff toured the WTP facility and met with DOE and its contractor staff to gather information. The NRC staff met with Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board staff to discuss the Board's authority and oversight role for the WTP. The NRC staff also met with WTP-involved staff of Washington State regulatory agencies. To maintain transparency during the review, the staff made a public presentation on the review to the Tank Waste Committee of the Hanford Advisory Board. On February 13, 2008, the staff held a public meeting in Richland, Washington, to inform attendees of the scope of the review. The NRC will consider comments received throughout the review process and address them as appropriate.

The NRC staff will continue to maintain an open dialogue with DOE to facilitate the information gathering necessary for the review. The staff plans to meet with the Tank Waste Committee, in the near future, to provide an update. Once the report has been delivered to Congress and the Secretary of Energy, the staff will hold another public meeting to inform stakeholders of the results of its review.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Dale E. Klein

cc: Senator James M. Inhofe

Identical letter sent to:

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman, Committee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator James M. Inhofe

The Honorable Byron Dorgan
Chairman, Subcommittee on Energy
and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator Pete V. Domenici

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
cc: Representative Joe Barton

The Honorable Peter J. Visclosky
Chairman, Subcommittee on Energy
and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
cc: Representative David L. Hobson

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Chairman, Subcommittee on Clean Air
and Nuclear Safety
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator George V. Voinovich

The Honorable Rick Boucher
Chairman, Subcommittee on Energy
and Air Quality
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
cc: Representative Fred Upton