

January 28, 2010

Dan Mahoney
8 Arlington Street
Auburn, MA 01501

Dear Mr. Mahoney,

I was asked to reply to your recent letter to Mike Weber. I understand that you are interested in novel methods for chemically processing and other means for managing and disposing of nuclear waste. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is an independent regulatory agency whose primary mission is to protect public health and safety, the common defense and security, and the environment, in the use of nuclear materials, including the nation's spent nuclear fuel. While NRC does serve as an independent decision maker on safety matters under its jurisdiction, the NRC neither sets national policy nor does it develop new technologies for waste disposal. Information addressing some of your concerns may be found at NRC's website, and at the websites of the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, and the Government Accountability Office.

The nation's current policy for managing high-level radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel was established by the U.S. Congress under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, as amended. Pursuant to this law, in June 2008, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) applied to NRC for approval to build a geologic repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. The NRC staff is conducting a formal technical review of DOE's application. The Nuclear Regulatory Commissioners will base their decision to grant or deny DOE authorization to build a repository on the results of the NRC staff's independent review and on the outcome of a full and impartial public hearing. Information about NRC's review of DOE's application can be found on our website, <http://www.nrc.gov/waste/hlw-disposal/yucca-lic-app.html>. Information about DOE's repository program, the science supporting its application and waste management alternatives can be found at the DOE website, <http://www.ocrwm.doe.gov>.

As you may know, in March 2009, the Secretary of Energy testified before the Congress that the administration seeks to end the Yucca Mountain repository program. Since then, the administration has announced plans to study alternatives to geologic disposal at Yucca Mountain before deciding on a future nuclear waste management strategy. The administration said the new strategy could include reprocessing or other techniques. On September 23, 2009, the U.S. Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board devoted its fall meeting to the topic, "Implications of Fuel-cycle Technologies for Nuclear Waste Management and Disposal." At that meeting, industry representatives presented their plans for developing reprocessing as a method for reducing waste inventories in the U.S. The agenda, transcript and presentation materials from this meeting are available at the Board's website at: <http://www.nwtrb.gov/meetings/meetings.html>.

More recently, in November 2009, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report, "Nuclear Waste Management: Key Attributes, Challenges, and Costs of the Yucca Mountain Repository and Two Potential Alternatives," which you may also find of interest. You can locate the text of this report at the GAO website at: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1048.pdf>.

I hope that you find these links helpful. After you have consulted them, please feel free to contact me at Janet.Kotra@nrc.com if I can answer any questions about NRC's regulatory program.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Janet P. Kotra, Ph.D.
Senior Project Manager
Division of High-Level Waste Repository Safety
Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards

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