

February 21, 2014

The Honorable David P. Roe
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Roe:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of January 2, 2014, seeking information regarding low-level radioactive waste storage by NRC licensees. The majority of NRC licensee low-level waste is produced by commercial nuclear power plants, although radioactive materials users, such as medical facilities and industrial and research entities, also produce low-level waste. The NRC's preferred method for managing low-level waste is for it to be sent to permanent disposal facilities. However, it is not required by the NRC, as long as the waste can be safely and securely stored on site. Some licensees have chosen to continue to store low-level waste on site for various reasons (e.g., economics and facility access).

With the opening of the Waste Control Specialists, LLC low-level radioactive waste disposal facility near Andrews, Texas, in 2012, there is now a potential option for permanent disposal of Class B and C low-level radioactive waste for most generators of such waste. While this facility was established primarily for waste generators who are part of the Texas Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Compact (Texas and Vermont), it will accept low-level waste from outside generators with permission from the Compact Commission. However, greater-than-Class-C waste, which constitutes less than two percent by volume of all low-level waste, will not have an option for permanent disposal until the U.S. Department of Energy (the responsible Federal entity) develops its greater-than-Class-C waste disposal program.

There is no regulatory requirement for NRC or Agreement State licensees to report to us the amounts of low-level waste they store. Therefore, we are unable to provide a precise assessment of the total amount of low-level nuclear waste stored on site at either NRC- or Agreement State-licensed facilities. The agency also believes the estimates of annual class B and C waste production, cited in the NRC staff paper you referenced in your letter, continue to be reasonable assumptions. That is, commercial nuclear power plants produce waste at an annual rate of up to 200-250 ft³ per unit, and materials users produce a combined volume of approximately 1,000 ft³ per year. However, given the recent addition of the Waste Control Specialists site as a permanent disposal facility, we expect that the total waste stored on other licensee's sites will decrease.

I hope this information is useful to you. If you have any questions, please contact me or the NRC's Office of Congressional Affairs at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Allison M. Macfarlane

Identical letter sent to:

The Honorable David P. Roe
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515