



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555

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November 7, 1979

OFFICE OF THE  
CHAIRMAN

The Honorable Dixy Lee Ray  
Governor of Washington  
State Capitol  
Olympia, Washington 98504

Dear Governor Ray:

I am grateful for the opportunity to have met with you and Governors List and Riley to discuss the pressing problems connected with the disposition of low level radioactive waste. I am writing you on a personal basis to confirm some of the essential elements of our discussions.

We face both short range and longer range problems. Both require action now. The immediate and critical problem is to deal with the waste being generated each day by hospitals, clinics, pharmaceutical plants and research institutes as a result of treating patients, carrying out needed medical research, and producing therapeutic and diagnostic medicines. With the Hanford and Beatty sites closed and the Barnwell site unavailable for much of this waste, we face the distinct possibility of the denial of needed medical services to the American people.

The longer term problem, of course, is that even when we had all three sites fully operational, the nation had a severe regional imbalance in the low level waste disposal capacity. The situation has been further exacerbated by instances of careless packaging and transport. Regulations and requirements were not being followed. It is clear that the Federal agencies have fallen short in the vigorous enforcement of their own regulations. On this latter point, NRC and the Department of Transportation are taking further steps to tighten up our regulatory efforts. We will continue working to make additional efforts in our inspection and enforcement activities. In addition, what we need is recognition on the part of all levels of government of the need to locate and develop additional low level waste sites in the country. I agree with you and Governors List and Riley that any program in this area must be based on the proposition that it is the responsibility of each State, either alone or in concert with other States on a regional basis, to deal with low level wastes being generated within its border. We will work with you and all the Governors in any way we can to get this program into operation.

In the meantime, I request that you do everything you can to reopen the Hanford site so that we can deal with the immediate and urgent national

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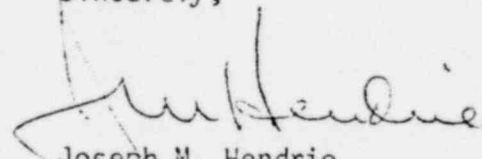
problem that threatens the ability of the nuclear medical community to continue to provide needed medical services. Of course, your decision to reopen the Hanford site must be based on your determination that the operation will be conducted safely. We can assist you in your efforts to assure safety.

If you do decide to reopen the Hanford facility, we will provide both personnel and contractual technical assistance support in your efforts to assure safe operation of the site. Such support would be designed to assist in the training and regulatory development program on the site. At the outset, NRC and DOT will assign up to three federal personnel at Hanford. We will seek additional ways to provide more support if needed.

Reopening of the Hanford site would provide needed time to develop new low level waste disposal sites. NRC will work closely with the States to provide licensing and technical assistance to assure sound siting decisions.

I thank you and Governors List and Riley for taking strong leadership actions toward the solution of these problems in the low level waste disposal area. I am sure that by working with the Governors of all the States we can obtain that solution. You can count on our support in whatever decision you may make on this matter.

Sincerely,



Joseph M. Hendrie  
Chairman

cc: Governor List  
Governor Riley

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