



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

July 7, 1978

The Honorable James T. Schlesinger
Secretary of Energy
Washington, D. C. 20555

Dear Mr. Secretary: *Jim*

The matter of the safe disposal of radioactive wastes from the nuclear fuel cycle is one of concern to both the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). Recent developments at the commercial low-level waste burial grounds have raised the question of whether adequate regionally distributed disposal capacity for the nation's low-level radioactive wastes will be available at the currently operating facilities.

Two of the six licensed commercial burial grounds (West Valley, New York and Maxey Flats, Kentucky) are closed. A third site, Sheffield, Illinois) has reached its licensed capacity. (Public hearings will be conducted on an application for site expansion.) A limit of 135,000 ft³ per month (the average monthly rate for 1977) has been placed by the State of South Carolina on the volume which may be accepted at the fourth site, (Barnwell, South Carolina). Thus, a large fraction of the waste from reactors and other waste generators located in the Eastern and Midwestern United States must soon be transported to the burial sites at Beatty, Nevada, and Hanford, Washington. In addition, an application for a new commercial burial site in New Mexico was withdrawn by the applicant on April 4. Very little flexibility exists in options for waste disposal if operational problems develop at the remaining sites.

NRC believes that additional standby capacity should be made available. Because there is no prospect of opening new commercial burial grounds in the near future, we believe it prudent for DOE to develop a contingency plan which would allow the DOE burial sites to accept commercially generated wastes should the need arise. Such a plan would be consistent with the Atomic Energy Commission's practices in the early 1960's, before a commercial disposal industry was established. It is also consistent with the recent DOE Task Force Report which suggested that all the burial grounds be operated as a national system.

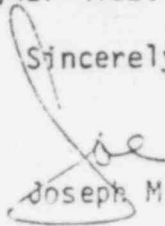
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NRC also requests that you consider disposing of waste from all DOE prime contractors at DOE burial grounds rather than at commercial burial sites.

Because the need is both important and somewhat urgent, we would appreciate your immediate attention to these requests. The NRC staff is prepared to cooperate with your staff on these matters. The NRC contact is Mr. Sheldon Meyers, Director, Division of Fuel Cycle and Material Safety. Mr. Meyers can be reached at (301)427-4152.

Sincerely,



Joseph M. Hendrie

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