



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

DCS
M-28

JAN 23 1980

The Honorable S. I. Hayakawa
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Hayakawa:

The following information is provided in response to the query of Ms. Annette Johnson concerning a "radioactive dam" (letter dated September 18, 1979). Although the staff has been unable to contact Ms. Johnson in order to obtain specific information regarding her concern, the staff believes that she may be referring to the United Nuclear Corporation's Church Rock Uranium Mill tailings dam failure of July 16, 1979. This event caused some radioactive tailings solution to be accidentally released into the nearby Rio Puerco which flows through Gallup, New Mexico.

The Rio Puerco becomes dry at a point about 20 miles west of the New Mexico/Arizona border. Only during infrequent periods will there be any flow in the portions of the Rio Puerco which connect with the Little Colorado and Colorado Rivers which in turn feed Lake Mead. An extensive monitoring program has been conducted on the stream by the State of New Mexico and the NRC. From the results of this program and the location of the Rio Puerco, it has been concluded that no contamination of any public water supply in either of the affected states, or in California, will result from the Church Rock dam failure.

Also in response to your request, enclosed is testimony recently delivered by the NRC staff before the House Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs on October 22, 1979; this testimony gives a more complete description of the tailings dam failure.

I trust this information is responsive to your request. If you need additional assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Original signed by R. G. Smith

Lee V. Gossick
Executive Director for Operations

Enclosure:
Testimony dtd 10/22/79 re
Church Rock dam failure

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TESTIMONY OF
WILLIAM J. DIRCKS, DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL SAFETY AND SAFEGUARDS
U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT,
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
OCTOBER 22, 1979

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