

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

September 27, 1989

Director
Office of Congressional Affairs
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
1717 H St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20555

Re: James L. Ritchie
Smoke detectors--hazardous
waste

Dear Sir:

Enclosed you will find a letter I received from a constituent of mine, Mr. James Ritchie, who is concerned about the possible emissions of radioactive material from smoke and heat detectors.

It appears that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has ruled that smoke and fire detectors containing radioactivity are exempt from regulation under pre-emptive rules. It appears that this matter concerns my constituent very much.

I am writing to request an explanation of the ruling by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Any information you can forward to me that would help me formulate an appropriate response to my constituent's concerns would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your help in this matter, and if I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

With best personal regards, I am,

Sincerely,



WALTER B. JONES
Member of Congress

WBJ:Pcc
Enclosure

Rt. 3, Box 180-R,
Newport, NC 28570
September 18, 1989

The Honorable Walter E. Jones,
241 Cannon Building,
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am enclosing two letters which I believe are self explanatory. One written to the Carteret County County Manager, and the other a reply from Gov. Jim Martin regarding the same subject.

I would like to reiterate that the radioactive materials used in the smoke detectors is usually AMERICIUM 241. This material has a life of 475 years/half life. One milligram of this material emits 7 billion alpha particles per minute! There are probably millions of these detectors disposed of through public land fill areas per year.

With reference to Jim Martin's letter, please note that apparently the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission exempted smoke and heat detectors from requirement(s) for disposal as "hazardous waste".

I am concerned that with this type disposal (land fill areas), that with millions of these units disposed of in this manner, that as the container for the radioactive material deteriorates, then there will be severe water contamination in and around the land fill area(s).

In view of the above, I believe that the NRC should be approached to change their ruling on these items and require that they be disposed of as any other radioactive matter is.

Best personal regards.



JAMES L. RITCHIE

enc ltr to County Mgr
ltr frn Gov Martin

cc GF



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
RALEIGH 27603-8001

JAMES G. MARTIN
GOVERNOR

September 12, 1989

Mr. James L. Ritchie
Route 3, Box 180-R
Newport, North Carolina 28570

Dear Mr. Ritchie:

Thank you for your letter expressing concern over the proper disposal of radioactive material contained in smoke and fire detectors. In our society today there are a large number of household products containing a wide variety of potentially dangerous substances. I am pleased to see our citizens, such as yourself, concerned enough to investigate things that they can do to protect our environment.

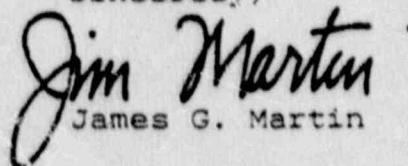
Devices containing radioactive material can be properly disposed of by returning them to the manufacturer or shipping them to a radioactive waste disposal facility. However, it must be noted that most smoke and fire detectors containing radioactivity are exempt from regulation under preemptive U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) rules. As a result, these devices may also be legally disposed of as normal trash. The NRC originally approved this exemption based on their determination that the benefits of such safety devices far outweigh any risks associated with their likely disposal in normal trash.

Should you wish additional information regarding the disposal of radioactive material, I suggest you contact Dayne H. Brown, Director, Division of Radiation Protection, Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources, P.O. Box 27687, Raleigh, North Carolina 27611-7687. Mr. Brown can provide you with specific information on how to contact radioactive waste disposal service companies and otherwise assist you in the disposal of this material.

Mr. James L. Ritchie
September 12, 1989
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I appreciate your taking the time to bring your concerns to my attention. I encourage you to continue to work with us to make your government work more effectively to meet the needs of our citizens.

Sincerely,


James G. Martin

JGM:lp1

Rt. 3, Box 130-R,
Newport, NC 28570
August 14, 1989

Mr. Ken Windley,
Carteret County Manager,
Courthouse Square,
Beaufort, NC 28516

Dear Mr. Windley:

I am advising you of a problem concerning disposal of a radioactive material. The material is several microcuries of AMERICIUM 241, better known as ^{Am}241, with a life of 475 years/half life. One milligram of this material emits 2 billion alpha particles per minute!! This radioactive material is contained in smoke and heat warning systems in the average home.

I contacted several organizations that are connected with the Carteret County Landfill on Hibbs Road. No one was able to give me an answer as to ~~disposal~~ disposal - EXCEPT the Carteret County Fire Marshal. He advised me that "do to the infinitesimal amount of radioactive materials, to "toss" the unit into my garbage"!!! Unfortunately, I have to disagree with his "advice". A few thousand units tossed into the landfill? Garbage glows..

In view of the above, I am contacting the State Division of Environmental Management, and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency. Copies of these letters are also being submitted to a concerned office in Beaufort.

Ken - I suggest that whereas the "Fire Marshal" was not an elected position, that you start interviewing a replacement. Either this, or at least make certain he attends an educational course on disposal of radioactive material(s).

Sincerely,

JAMES L. FLETCHER

JLR:lg

cc DW
GF

J. Morris (CTY)
J. Martin (State)