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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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July 3, 1980

Joseph M. Hendrie, Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

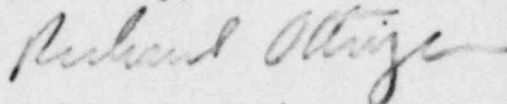
Dear Mr. Hendrie,

I am concerned about the enclosed letter written by the director of the National Campaign for Radioactive Waste Safety.

According to Mr. Montague, the cesium content of wastes being stored from Three Mile Island is "hundreds of times higher than the NRC's own proposed upper limit" for wastes described as low-level.

I would appreciate your timely comments.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Ottinger
Member of Congress

RLO:nep

POOR ORIGINAL

A Danger-Laden Pit on Three Mile Island

To the Editor:

Recent discussions of krypton releases from Three Mile Island seem to have overlooked a potentially much more hazardous radioactive waste problem at the crippled plant.

Cooling water contaminated with cesium-137 is being continually pumped out of the damaged plant and stored in tanks. To assure sufficient tank capacity to allow cooling to proceed, the cesium is being removed from the stored water by a resin filtering process called Epicor-II. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has described the resulting resinous radioactive wastes in a document called Nureg-0591.

This document repeatedly refers to the cesium wastes as "low-level" wastes suitable for disposal in shallow trenches at an existing "low-level" waste burial ground. However, I have looked carefully at the description of these wastes presented in Nureg-0591, and the cesium content of these wastes is hundreds of times higher than the N.R.C.'s own proposed upper limit for cesium content of wastes defined as "low-level."

Thus, by current proposed definitions of "low-level" wastes, the T.M.I. cesium wastes are not disposable in shallow trenches. They will need to be

buried in deep geologic repositories, along with the rest of the nation's "high-level" wastes.

No suitable geologic repositories now exist. President Carter announced Feb. 12 that his new waste-management program will identify suitable sites for such repositories by 1985 and will actually have a repository operating by 1995. Thus, even if the President's program goes forward without any setbacks or delays, the T.M.I. wastes will need to be temporarily stored for at least 15 years.

Nureg-0591 correctly says that no suitable shipping casks now exist to transport these cesium wastes. Casks will have to be designed, then licensed by N.R.C. These wastes are accumulating at the rate of approximately 25,000 curies per year. They are being stored in a pit in the ground at T.M.I.

Perhaps focusing additional attention on this problem would speed up the process of removing these wastes. An island in the middle of a large river hardly seems an ideal storage depot for tens of thousands of curies of biologically active material for a decade or more.

PETER MONTAGUE
Director, National Campaign
for Radioactive Waste Safety
Lawrenceville, N.J., June 11, 1980