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1-25-91

James Kennedy  
Office of Nuclear Materials Safety and Safeguards  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

The following comments on SECY 90-318 represent my concerns as a citizen scientist.

From the advent of nuclear energy to the present, it is clear to me that rigorous regulatory science has routinely been subservient to military and nuclear power policy interests. If one examines the military sector's record, fear of a perceived threat has been used to justify secrecy, deliberate worker/public radiation exposure, and massive environmental contamination. The civilian record is dominated by the nuclear power industry which continues to obtain significant externalization of costs such as waste disposal, research and development, radiation safety, and liability protection. In both cases it is apparent that a relative lack of public access to information combined with a regulatory apparatus largely subservient to nuclear interests has resulted in the mess in which we find ourselves.

The current attempt to transfer title or ownership really reflects 1) a realization of the truly massive expenditures required to effectively maintain environmental isolation of radioactive waste, and thus 2) an effort to shift responsibility for that cost from the federally licensed generators to the respective states. The latter must not happen. Title and, in most cases, possession must remain with the generator because 1) no new sites are to be contaminated, and 2) as the costs of waste storage are fully internalized to the generators, the economic consequences of further waste production will be factored into current operating decisions, providing the strongest of incentives for waste reduction.

With regard to your specific questions 4,5,6), my opinion is this attempt to shift responsibility for costs associated with isolation of radioactive wastes will be successfully challenged in court, as has already been the case with many toxic chemical dumping trials. Transfer of title will only serve to 'muddy the waters' and add to the public's legal expense.

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Regarding questions 1,2), current on-site storage methods are the best approximation we have at present to engineered, above ground, monitored, retrievable storage (MRS). As these age additional state-of-the-art facilities should be constructed at existing sites.

In respect to questions 3,7), our experience to date demonstrates 1) the failure of past attempts at 'permanent disposal' of radioactive wastes (especially those with half-lives greater than approximately twenty years), and 2) the ensuing mushrooming of costs associated with recovery and re-containment of those wastes. It is now time to stop seeking 'assurances' for 'permanent disposal' and instead time to start implementing a long-term MRS program for these wastes. The NRC should not contemplate any licensing activity which would add to this waste stream before sufficient experience has been accumulated with MRS to demonstrate its effectiveness and safety.

Please keep me informed of further developments.

Sincerely,



James Rauch, R.Ph.