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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REACTOR SAFEGUARDS
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555



October 21, 1980

The Honorable Butler Derrick
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Derrick:

This letter is provided in response to your letter of August 28, 1980, which expresses your concern about the handling and disposal of radioactive wastes from the Three Mile Island Unit 2 (TMI-2) facility. As you may be aware, there will be a variety of wastes generated in the cleanup and recovery operations at the TMI-2 site. Some of these wastes will be very similar to wastes from other nuclear facilities and will include radioactive contaminated trash, rubbish, tools, ion exchange materials, etc. These wastes are representative of materials categorized as low-level wastes which are routinely handled at licensed commercial waste burial facilities. On the other hand, due to the unique nature of the accident at TMI-2, some of the wastes that will be generated will be unlike those normally handled by the commercial utility industry or by any other licensed commercial activity. These wastes may include high specific activity ion exchange materials which are unsuitable for shallow land burial at a commercial facility. It is these high activity wastes which Dr. Bernard J. Snyder, Director of the Three Mile Island Program Office, indicated as being most appropriately handled at a DOE facility. These wastes are unique to the commercial nuclear utility industry, but are in many respects quite similar to wastes handled at various DOE facilities on a fairly routine basis.

Accordingly, due to the anticipated nature of these special wastes, it is important to realize that there are no existing commercial disposal facilities or technologies available for suitable disposal of these special wastes. Thus, until the technology and facilities are developed by DOE for the future handling of commercial high activity wastes, storage of these wastes at the TMI site is essentially the only commercial alternative.

In the interest of protecting public health and safety, NRC believes that (1) the TMI site, located as it is on an island in the Susquehanna River, is not a logical or desirable permanent storage location for such special wastes, and (2) the utility should not be required to undertake extensive research and development activities at the site to develop suitable processes for ultimate disposition of these special wastes.

In view of the above, I hope you can understand why the NRC, in its consideration of potential alternatives as required by NEPA, has entered into discussions with DOE concerning their potential involvement in these difficult waste management activities. In fact, the Congress has clearly mandated that DOE provide assistance in resolving the problems associated with ultimate disposal of these wastes in a timely manner as indicated in the following

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paragraphs from the Report of the House Appropriations Committee on H. R. 7542, (Report No. 96-1086), the DOE Supplemental Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 1980:

The Committee recommends \$5,000,000 for Three Mile Island examination activities to permit preparations for core examination, as well as the processing and disposal of radioactive wastes, in concert with work being undertaken by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, General Public Utilities, and the State of Pennsylvania.

The Committee is deeply disturbed by the Department's inaction in quickly helping to resolve a technically sound and workable method for the safe removal of radioactive wastes from the Three Mile Island site. The Committee considers that the Department has an overriding public responsibility to assist NRC, the State of Pennsylvania and the utility, as necessary, to resolve as quickly as possible an acceptable process to isolate and remove these wastes to a safe disposal site. The Committee requests a report not later than June 30, 1980, on the Department's activities and programs in this regard.

There are a number of DOE facilities that potentially have the capability for storing, and subsequently processing, TMI special wastes to a form for ultimate disposition. The impact of handling these wastes on DOE resources should be minimal. To put the matter in perspective, it is interesting to note the following comparisons of the inventory of radioactivity and volume of potential special TMI-2 wastes with similar wastes currently in storage at all DOE facilities and at the Savannah River Plant:

	<u>Radioactivity Inventory, Curies</u>	<u>Volume, ft.³</u>
Special TMI-2 Wastes	600,000	2,500
All DOE Wastes	600,000,000	2,400,000
Savannah River Plant Wastes	250,000,000	350,000

As you can see in both key aspects, the special TMI-2 wastes represent about 0.1% or one one-thousandth of similar materials already on hand at DOE facilities.

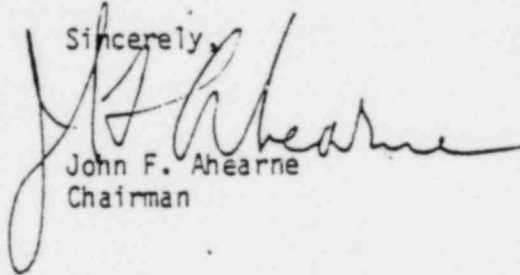
The Honorable Butler Derrick

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There is no intention to make the TMI cleanup a total responsibility of the federal government. In fact, the utility is expending large amounts of resources in the form of funds and management and technical capabilities in pursuing the cleanup efforts. Further, the NRC has embarked on a comprehensive review of the environmental impacts involved in this program and recently published its "Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement related to decontamination and disposal of radioactive wastes resulting from March 28, 1979, accident Three Mile Island Nuclear Station, Unit 2," NUREG-0683. Enclosed is a copy for your information. The NRC is giving careful attention to all aspects of this very difficult matter. The protection of the health and safety of the public will be a prime consideration in the decision as to how to dispose of these wastes.

Your interest in the solution to this special waste management problem is appreciated and your thoughts will be considered in its resolution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John F. Ahearne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "A".

John F. Ahearne
Chairman

Enclosure:
NUREG-0683

Draft Programmatic **Environmental Impact Statement**

related to decontamination and disposal
of radioactive wastes resulting from
March 28, 1979, accident
Three Mile Island Nuclear Station, Unit 2

Docket No. 50-320

Metropolitan Edison Company
Jersey Central Power and Light Company
Pennsylvania Electric Company

July 1980

Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555



BUTLER DERRICK
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COMMITTEE:
RULES

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

August 28, 1980

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Chairman John F. Ahearne
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
1717 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Chairman Ahearne:

It has been brought to my attention that an NRC employee assigned to the Three Mile Island (TMI) project, Dr. Bernard Snyder, indicated at a press conference this week that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission may have to involve the Department of Energy in handling the radioactive waste from TMI. If the Department of Energy were to become involved, the Savannah River Plant (SRP) in South Carolina could be a prime candidate to receive this waste.

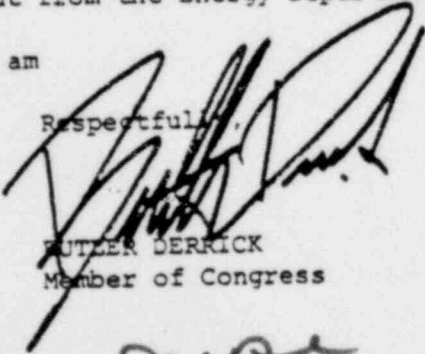
As the Congressman representing the Savannah River Plant area, I would actively object to any decision to dispose of Three Mile Island's radioactive waste at any Department of Energy facility, and in particular, at the Savannah River facility. As an unlicensed defense facility, SRP would not be the appropriate disposal site for licensed commercial waste. From a technical position, the commercial waste would best be handled with other commercial waste, rather than disposing of it with defense waste.

While I recognize the vast problems facing the Commission as you work on the clean-up of Three Mile Island, I feel it is important to acknowledge that Three Mile should not become the federal government's total responsibility. The matter of TMI waste disposal is a complex problem; however, it appears to me that the Commission, in turning to the Energy Department, is opting for a convenient solution rather than making a difficult decision based on technological and safety conditions.

Further, South Carolina has been accepting a disproportionate amount of the nation's nuclear waste for many years. We are presently receiving approximately 70 percent of the commercial low-level radioactive waste and a significant amount of defense high and low-level waste is being stored at SRP. It would be totally unrealistic to expect South Carolina to accept the commercial waste from TMI and I would hope that the Commission would seek a better solution to the disposal problem rather than seeking a bail-out from the Energy Department.

With kindest regards, I am

Respectfully,


BUTLER DERRICK
Member of Congress

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