



CHAIRMAN

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

November 4, 1980

The Honorable John L. Burton
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Burton:

On October 1, 1980 I responded to your letter of August 28, 1980 requesting information about the disposal of radioactive wastes in the ocean. In the same letter, I also informed you that additional information about disposals by AEC licensees may be in retired AEC files. We are retrieving retired files for AEC licensees who were authorized to dispose of radioactive waste at sea. We intend to review these files to provide the Environmental Protection Agency any additional pertinent information which it might need. Because of the high interest in the disposal of radioactive wastes, we believe you should be aware of some licensed uses of radioactive material in the oceans. Three uses have been identified. These are summarized in the enclosure to this letter.

In my letter of October 1, 1980 I stated that data available indicates that material disposed of at sea would not include high-level reprocessed radioactive waste from chemical reprocessing plants or irradiated spent fuel assemblies from nuclear reactors. However, our staff does not have the primary data regarding disposition of high-level radioactive waste from AEC contractor and DOD operations. Rather, the NRC staff depended on statements made over the years to Congress by AEC officials to the effect that no high-level waste had been disposed at sea. Therefore, I believe that Mr. Richard E. Cunningham's statement to the Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources Subcommittee on October 7, 1980, more accurately reflects our understanding of the situation regarding disposal of high-level waste in the ocean. Mr. Cunningham's statement was, "The AEC regulatory staff logs do not indicate the specific character or isotopic content of the wastes. The information we do have, however, about the byproduct, source, and special nuclear material content of the waste as well as its origin, in some instances, does not lead us to believe that high-level radioactive waste from chemical reprocessing plants or irradiated fuel assemblies was included in ocean disposals."

I hope this information will be useful to you.

Sincerely,


John F. Ahearne

Enclosure:
Use of Radioactive Material
Under AEC/NRC License in
the Ocean

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