

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

May 20, 1981

TO: Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
1717 H Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20555

FROM: Alfonse D'Amato  
United States Senator

Because of the desire of this office to be responsive to all inquiries and communications, your consideration of the attached is requested.

PLEASE TRY TO RESPOND WITHIN 4 WEEKS OF YOUR RECEIPT OF THIS REQUEST. YOUR FINDINGS AND VIEWS, IN DUPLICATE, ALONG WITH RETURN OF THIS MEMO PLUS ENCLOSURE, WILL BE APPRECIATED.

Many thanks.

5/27...To OCA for Direct Reply...Suspense: June 15..Docket..31-0730

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11 Audrey Court  
Malverne, NY 11565

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March 12, 1981

The Honorable Alphonse D'Amato  
United States Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20025

Dear Senator D'Amato:

When I read the attached article, I couldn't believe my eyes.

*ML*  
I have always been of the opinion (naively perhaps) that the government basically was concerned with serving the best interests of the public. The plan expressed in this article not only is appalling in itself, but makes one wonder what other things are being planned or, in fact, have already been carried out, which not only do not serve the public good but are detrimental to the public good.

Enough problems have inadvertantly been created by radioactive waste without deliberately creating more potentially dangerous situations.

If we are to place our trust in our government, then they must act in a way which merits that trust.

I urge you to do all that you can to prevent this plan from becoming a reality.

Sincerely,

*Miriam Hecht*

Miriam Hecht

3/10/81

## Want Skillets That Contain Atomic Waste?

By JOHN R. EMSWILLER

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The government would like to get rid of some radioactive waste by turning it over to the public. But the public hardly seems enthusiastic about the idea.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering an Energy Department proposal to permit the sale of metals that have been contaminated at federal nuclear-fuel processing plants. Once sold, the steel, copper, nickel and other metals could be used for nearly anything. The NRC suggests the metal's might be used in automobiles, frying pans, jewelry, surgical pins and dietary supplements, such as iron tonic.

### "Outrageous" Idea

NRC officials say the move doesn't pose a health hazard because the radiation involved is extremely small. But some people aren't happy about the idea that their next frying pan might be a little hot even before it reaches the stove. The commission has already received about 3,300 written comments on the plan — an agency record. Nearly all express opposition, often vehemently.

"Why don't you just eat your radioactive waste?" suggests a writer. Another calls the plan "one of the more outrageous ideas to

"If there isn't any way to stipulate where the material is going, there isn't any way to know it will be used. It sounds like a lousy idea," says Prof. Edward P. Radford, an environmental epidemiologist at the University of Pittsburgh.

Some also worry that the proposal could be just the first step in relaxing the government's definition of a radioactive hazard. "As a harbinger of things to come, it makes me very nervous," says Jan Beyea, senior energy scientist for the National Audubon Society.

### A Money-Maker?

Selling contaminated scrap could help alleviate the country's mounting problem with low-level nuclear garbage. It even could be profitable. The NRC estimates that the government could earn about \$42 million from the sale of about 42,000 metric tons of metal from worn-out machinery at three federal nuclear-fuel processing plants.

The potential radiation doses to individuals would vary widely, depending on the metal's use. Most uses would result in exposure well below the 100 millirems or so that the typical person receives yearly from background sources, according to the NRC environmental report. For instance, the agency calculates that a person working 1,000 hours a year in a room made of the metal would receive a radiation dose of 0.05 millirem annually.

But wearing a bracelet of contaminated copper for 16 hours a day for a year could result in a dose of 290 millirems. While the NRC concedes that's "relatively high," it says the dose is safe because it "would be localized to the area in contact with the bracelet" and wouldn't reach vital organs. In the case of a tainted belt buckle, the commission says clothing would provide an added safety margin.

### Little Danger

The commission also contends that people wouldn't have to worry if the metal were inside the body. A surgically fitted stainless steel pin could give a dose of 440 millirems a year to the adjacent bone, but one centimeter away from the pin, the dose would drop to 0.01 millirem. And the carrier would be an "essentially negligible" radiation source to others, the NRC says.

In its effort to control the garbage problem, the commission recently approved a plan to exempt some wastes from strict burial rules. There are only three sites—in Nevada, Washington State and South Carolina—for storing low-level radioactive waste. Local politicians and citizens' groups have been pressing to limit the flow of trash to those dumps.

The new burial rule, which goes into effect soon, will allow medical wastes, such as testing liquids and animal carcasses containing small amounts of radioactivity, to be dumped in local landfills. The commission says the material represents about 15% of the waste that went to the three federal burial sites last year. Each year, about 18,000 dogs and 500,000 smaller animals are radioactively contaminated in medical research.

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come out of idiotic bureaucrats." A third wonders whether some NRC official is in the scrap-metal business.

Scientists involved in radiation health matters also express concern. Although none has studied the specific proposal and all say the potential radiation sounds small, some scientists contacted about the plan say any uncontrolled release of even low-level radiation is risky.