Southern California Chapter

Health Physics Society

April 28, 1981

Councilman Marvin Braude
City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Councilman Braude:

Subject: Comments on Radiological Significance of Radioisotopes Buried at Veterans Administration Medical Center

On April 14, 1981 three members of the Southern California Chapter of the Health Physics Society, Albert L. Baietti, William A. Larson, and Fred W. Sanders, met with your assistants Carrie Chassin and Clara Rogger, with Kay Slavkin and Joan Shaffran-Brandt, assistants to Congressman Anthony Beilenson, and others to provide information about the potential radiation problem of a proposed park (playground) to be created on Veterans Administration land at the V.A.'s Wadsworth Medical Center.

Health Physicists are scientists and engineers whose profession is dedicated to protecting people, their possessions, and the environment from harmful effects of ionizing radiation. There are about 5,000 health physicists in the United States, half the world total. The Health Physics Society is their professional organization.

Representatives of the V.A. Hospital stated that their records show that 48 millicuries of carbon-14 and 1,200 millicuries of tritium were buried on the site between the years 1960 and 1968. The tritium has since decayed to about 600 millicuries.

The three health physicists (all of whom are certified by the American Board of Health Physics) agreed that these quantities of these radionuclides buried under a park do not present a health risk to people using the park. I have consulted other health physicists including Dr. John A. Auxier, the Director of the Health Physics and Industrial Safety Division at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Dr. Auxier is a Past President of the Health Physics Society and is nationally and internatnationaly respected for his expertise in health physics. All of these experts agree; there is no health risk.

As a brief (and not too technical comparison) 600 millicuries of tritium is about the amount contained in 2 or 3 digital wristwatches with tritium night lights. An exit sign in an airplane using tritium for its illumination would contain 3,000 to 15,000 millicuries. The 48 millicuries of carbon-14 is about the same amount as the natural radioactive material in the top 3 meters of soil under a field 50 by 100 meters.

Enclosure 4

In summary, the Southern California Chapter of the Health Physics Society does not take a position as to whether there should or should not be a park on the land in question. The Executive Committee of the Chapter does feel that there is no rational reason to rule out a park on the basis of radiation risk. The claim that radiation effects are not understood is not true. Millions of man-hours and millions of dollars expended over the last 35 years place radioactive materials among the best understood hazardous materials. We also feel that if large amounts of money were spent in a core drilling sampling program or environmental impact investigation, the money would be wasted.

The Chapter would like to offer its services to provide a rational scientific basis for management judgments and to ease the discomfort of lack of information.

Sincerely,

Fred W. Sanders

Fred W. Sanders
Certified Health Physicist
President, Southern California Chapter
Health Physics Society

cc: Anthony C. Beilenson