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Mr. Robert M. Bernero
Director
Office Of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Dear Mr. Bernero:

I am writing to express my concerns about the recent decisions by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding the Umetco Minerals Corporation White Mesa Mill at Blanding, Utah.

Recent actions by the NRC have resulted in amending the Umetco operating license permitting the mill to dispose of waste generated at other, smaller sites. While these actions are in general accordance with NRC requirements to reduce the number of disposal sites, I believe that the specific situations involved have not been fully examined by the mill operator or NRC.

It is my understanding that the Umetco mill is currently in a standby status and has previously submitted a reclamation plan, but intends to re-start operations to dispose of in-situ leach radioactive waste materials. NRC has made the determination that the environmental impact is not of enough significance to warrant an environmental report or the issuance of an environmental impact statement. I believe that there are substantial differences between the previous mill operators or standby status and those involved with importing and disposing of waste from other areas.

In contrast to the treatment of Umetco, an example of a company that has complied with the National Environmental Policy Act and other requirements is Envirocare in my district. Envirocare of Utah began its licensing process four years ago. At the time Envirocare included the Environmental Impact Statement and other technical information developed and used by the Department of Energy and the State of Utah for site selection and disposal of Vitro chemical uranium mill tailings at the Clive site. As detailed as those studies were, NRC rejected them as incomplete or irrelevant and required Envirocare to repeat the process, leading to a publication of a lengthy Environmental Impact Statement to demonstrate the suitability of its proposed site as a disposal facility.

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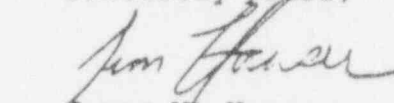
Mr. Robert M. Bernero
December 14, 1993
Page 2

The NRC has required from Envirocare an enormous amount of data, that has cost them millions to comply with, and the licensing process has taken more than four years to complete. It seems that in light of this, granting Umetco a license without even requiring an Environmental Impact Statement would be inappropriate.

It has been suggested that the volume of the off-site radioactive waste is relatively small as compared to the existing mill tailings at the UMETCO site. Review of Condition 51-B and 55-C of the license amendment contemplates as much as 600,000 tons of off-site radioactive waste and tailings to be disposed of at the facility with anticipation of additional increases in the future. Commercial disposal of such quantities of waste clearly is not small by any standard in the disposal industry and the transportation of such volumes easily require appropriate environmental assessments.

In view of the foregoing, would you please explain to me why the NRC has required such extensive data and compliance from Envirocare, and exempted Umetco?

Sincerely yours,


James V. Hansen
Member of Congress

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