

Bellevue
Tues. Oct. 9, 1973
3900 Canton Pl.
Oklahoma City, Okla 73112

Atomic Energy Commission
Washington D.C.

Gentlemen:

Since the writing of our letter of October 1, 1973 we have reviewed the AEC Public Records at the Public Library, Guthrie, Okla. We commend you for the excellent attitude of candor and openness that this concept represents. It is appropriate affirmative action in respect to the public right to have access to the relevant facts. We were also impressed with the directness and thoroughness of the AEC inspection reports of the Cimarron facility and the related AEC correspondence with the Kerr-McGee Corp.

As a consequence of this review, we offer the following additional commentary:

1. We are furious because Mr Finn and Mr Ridgeway verbally gave us a public-relations type picture of a well conducted operation at Cimarron; one that held no unusual safety hazards for the employees. This is in sharp contrast to the general conditions that they reported in their inspection of the Cimarron Plant on June 18-22, 1973. In that report we noted seven new violations, three significant new problems and comment that six previously reported violations were still unresolved. Further, on page 8, under Management Interview it reads: "... The inspector discussed the violations. He stated that most of the violations indicated a lack of concern for following procedures and posted limits and also an absence of management audit of performance of employees and enforcing compliance with the procedures."

The previous inspection reports also cite various failures in procedures and documentation, as well as several fires (March 5 1973 and October 18, 1972) and several excessive exposures of employees. (March 5, 1973 and Nov. 11, 1972.)

This situation seems to typify the conflict that some of your personnel have between telling the public the unvarnished truth and promoting nuclear power. While their inspection reports were candid about the safety conditions, they verbally seemed to be pre-acting Kerr-McGee.

2. The content of the news story* to Jim Reid of the Daily Oklahoman of Sept. 29, 1973 by your Chicago office is misleading. It reads "... Kerr McGee Corp. has received a clean bill of health from the Atomic Energy Comm. following an investigation of a minor leak of nuclear material at its Cimarron facility." While this is probably Mr. Reid's reasonable conclusion, based on what he was told, it leaves an overall impression that does not correlate well with the general conditions outlined in your June inspection report. The fact that some violations were involved was buried at the end of the story, therefore, the lead line will tend to prevail. That is slanted news.

** attached*

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PDR FOIA
WIDMER83-5 PDR

Further, the story is stated that the plutonium nitrate waste had a low level of radioactivity. That seems to conflict with verbal AEC reports to us that it is over 100,000 dpm. Further the story categorically conflicts with the inspection report of June 18-22, 1973, page 17, C. "Higher concentrations are solidified for disposal through a licensed waste disposal agency." (Low level liquid wastes being disposed via holding tanks, evaporation ponds, lagoons and the Cimarron River.)

Elsewhere in the story, confusion is again created by giving the right answer to the wrong problem. We were well aware that the mass of plutonium in the 55-gallon drum was so small that it could not go critical. We resent that type of smoke screen news, or to suggest that the overall topic of criticality at the plant is not germane. For example, your inspection reports document inadequate spacing of "milk drums" (criticality) and inadequate shielding/separation to minimize neutron action. Further, on the overall subject of accidental nuclear criticality vs design features to prevent it, the March 12, 1973 letter (ITS-014) from the Directorate of Licensing to Kerr McGee states: "You properly point out that the probability of a criticality incident is effectively minimized by design features and appropriate procedures. However a criticality incident is creditable. We therefore request that the consequences of criticality be more thoroughly and quantitatively analyzed."

Consequently, in view of your documented reports of Kerr-McGee's inability to write and enforce adequate operating procedures, or to assure the reasonably constant availability of a radiation physicist, our faith is a little strained in respect to not having a criticality accident. Further, there is no compelling evidence that the design competency will be better than the operational competency.

Further, the story infers the trivial nature of record keeping problems, however; the license and inspection reports seem to indicate that the maintenance of accurate data at the glove boxes and the accountability of fissionable material are significant. In view of the incredibly carcinogenic nature of plutonium, it would seem that precise accountability would be highly important.

Again, we do not find the statement "... But as long as the contamination is contained on the plant site there is no danger," to be acceptable. High winds and cloudbursts do not respect plant fences and may carry away some plutonium waste. Gone With the Wind may apply to the population as well as the plutonium. From a long range cumulative aspect, which is the only rational way to view so incredibly dangerous and long persistence material, any emission must be viewed with alarm. A 99.99% containment of plutonium, for example, would be quite unacceptable.

3. We conclude, from the above, that the public's right to know the facts would be better served if news releases were prepared in Oklahoma based on the AEC public records.

* Our notes are not clear if the vacant position in mind was, in fact, a physicist. If not, it was obvious that a key technical position was involved.

4. We note a serious conceptual oversight in license requirements for the technical staff, i.e. redundancy or readily available qualified back-up for key technical personnel when attrition occurs. Attrition is particularly inherent in the employment of highly educated and skilled personnel.
5. Another conceptual oversight in staffing policy was not anticipating the possibility of labor-relations problems and consequently not having sufficient depth in technical supervision to maintain both production and safety with management-types of inexperienced workers as production personnel.
6. Another concept that you need to consider is one that has been found to be valid in many industries. That the foreman is the key to effective occupational safety. He must be strong enough to insist on either safe production or no production, no production-no pay. This means that the foreman must be equally competent in production, safety and human / labor-management relations. Since the foreman represents management, it is absolutely essential that management policy and practices be conducive to good labor-management relations. Further, when an enlightened policy prevails, another positive force may appear-- a good union will chastise its own members for violations of safety rules.

In view of the problem in safety, attrition and labor relations, as documented in the public records, we conclude that there is a cause-effect relationship between management's labor policies and the safety record. This therefore raises doubts as to Kerr McGee's ability to understand and cope with the complex mix of requirements and performance stipulated by the plutonium License.

7. We were appalled by the many violations and personnel exposures documented in your reports. In view of the over-exposures to plutonium, we conclude that some of the workers will die, possibly 5 to 15 years hence. It is a shame that people so often have to be protected from those charged to protect them.
8. It has now become so very obvious why we received the telephone calls from the anonymous workers at the plutonium plant. Incident after incident- report after report- words after words, and no improvement occurred. Apparently it was "no big deal" to management. In view of all of the foregoing, the workers called us out of concern, frustration, and a feeling of powerlessness.
9. It would appear, in spite of its inspection reports, the AEC has indulged Kerr McGee management, ~~showing~~ that it has not yet commanded the adequate attention of their top management.
10. The plutonium license was issued on April 2, 1970, however as indicated by public records, the AEC Directorate of Licensing, in their letter of May 12, 1973, is still trying to obtain responses

from Kerr-McGee relative to various aspect of the Environmental Impact Statement. Since the Public Record contains no further information, we assume that the Directorate could not yet have reached a decision because to have done so would deny the public the facts upon which such a decision would have to be based.

11. There is evidence, in the Public Records, of the patent lack of good faith on the part of Kerr McGee in respect to the public's right to know the facts. It appears that Kerr McGee did not want to be a "Good Neighbor" in the community in that it wished to conceal from the public that it was manufacturing a highly, carcinogenic and persistent material. For example, in their letter of April 17, 1973 to the AEC Directorate of Licensing; first paragraph.... "However, we believe that some of the information requested should not be included in the environmental report, and request your consideration of our proposal to omit the items discussed below from our submittal. The items of information which Kerr McGee objects to having included in the environmental report are those items indicated by the following listed questions of your letter of March 12:

1. Purpose of Facility

1. What....
2. Do you have ...
3. What would be ther...

2. The Site (b) Local enviromental acceptance

1. What has been done in public relations to gain the acceptance of a plutonium plant in the region?
2. Have there been any local groups actively supporting or rejecting the concept of a plutonium plant?
3. Have you held any public meetings or hearings for the purpose of discussing the plant activities?

7. Alternatives (a) and(b)

1. Discuss the consequences of shutting plant down.
2. Discuss the impact of.....
3. Discussion for....

We do not believe that the above questions are proper subjects for inquiry in an environmental study. The information solicited will not contribute significantly to a better understanding of the environmental impact of the operation of the Cimarron Plutonium Plant. We realize that.... However we would prefer to furnish such information to the Commission by separate, private communications rather than having it included in a public record. Please let us know if you concur with our proposal to omit the answers to the above questions from the supplemental information to be submitted. If so, we would be willing to make the information requested by these questions available to the Commission if necessary for the Commission's purposes.

George B. Parks
Executive Vice President
Kerr McGee Corp. "

Consequently, contrary to the intent of the Calvert-Cliff's decision (July 23, 1971 Federal Court of Appeals) to date the public right-to-know has been abridged. None of the environmental groups have been advised of the existence or the dangers of having a plutonium plant in their midst. Likewise the news media and most key citizens interested in the environment did not know. On the other hand, AEC did not take any strong affirmative action to tell the public about the plant, nor was there any strong and effective action to tell the public about the Public Records at Guthrie, Okla. The AEC has been part of the information problem, not withstanding the excellent concept of public records. Consequently, had it not been the coincidence of being called by the anonymous workers, we and the public would still be unaware. This is a completely unacceptable situation. We recognize, however that in the AEC letter of May 12, 73, AEC emphasized that Kerr-McGee must respond.

- 13. In view of Kerr McGee's lack of good faith towards the community and its public health, its lack of interest in plant safety, it would appear to be in the public interest to revoke their plutonium license. We would hope this could be accomplished through the established administrative channels of the AEC.
- 14. Please advise us of the pertinent details of when and where the formal Environmental Impact hearing will be held for the Plutonium Plant at the Cimarron Facility.

Thank you,

Gene Younghein
Gaylord A. Younghein

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

Copy: Mr. Donahue, Chicago

*Enclosures: 1. News story of 9-17-73
agenda, Dismal Club*

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Atom Plant Passes Kerr-McGee In A-Leakage

Cimarron Spill Termed Minor, Of Common Type

By Jim Reid

Kerr-McGee Corp. has received a clean bill of health from the Atomic Energy Commission following an investigation of a minor leak of nuclear material at its Cimarron Facility near Crescent, Okla. The Oklahoman learned Friday.

James Donaghue, a representative of the AEC's Radiological and Environmental Protection Branch in Chicago, said the Aug. 18 incident was "no big deal."

Donaghue and two other AEC representatives, K. R. Ridgeway and John A. Finn, conducted an inspection of the Kerr-McGee plant last week.

Pellet Material Made

The plant mixes enriched uranium dioxide and ammonia to form a powder that is compressed into pellets that go into fuel rods for nuclear reactors used for generating electricity.

The operation produces plutonium nitrate, a nuclear waste material with a low level of radioactivity. The liquid waste is mixed with an agent that causes it to solidify in 55-gallon drums.

After the solidification process, the drums containing the plutonium nitrate are hauled off by an AEC-licensed disposal agent to a licensed burial site.

Waste from the Cimarron Facility is buried at either of two AEC installations at Sheffield, Ill., or Moorehead, Ky.

Contamination Slight

Donaghue said that on Aug. 18 a small amount of the plutonium nitrate leaked from one of the 55-gallon drums onto the floor of a small truck where it was stored prior to burial.

"There had apparently been a breakdown in the solidifying agent," he said.

Donaghue said there was no contamination of plant workers or of the environment. The contamination was contained in a small area, which was decontaminated according to AEC regulations.

"There was no emission off the site," he said.

In instances of this kind, Donaghue said, it is not necessary for the company to make a report to the AEC. However, the com-

Continued on Page 2, Col. 5

Atom Plant Passes Test

Continued From Page One
pany is required to document the incident, along with decontamination efforts, for review by AEC personnel during routine inspections.

Donaghue said Kerr-McGee complied with that rule.

He said leakages and spills of radioactive materials are "fairly common" around such facilities as the Kerr-McGee plant when containers rupture.

"But as long as the contamination is contained on the plant site there is no danger," Donaghue said.

He said the Cimarron Facility has had several such leaks — or spills —

since it went into operation in early 1965.

All of the incidents are on record in the public document section of the public library at Guthrie, along with inspection reports, Donaghue said.

Jim Allen, supervisor of the Chicago AEC branch, put to rest any fears that the plutonium nitrate produced at the Kerr-McGee plant could cause a nuclear explosion.

He said extra precautions are taken to keep the nuclear waste in small containers "so it won't go critical."

"We're satisfied that Kerr-McGee took adequate precautions in the area

contaminated by the leak," he said. "However, we are still evaluating the information obtained during the inspection."

Allen said there were probably be a couple of instances where Kerr-McGee did not comply with AEC regulations.

"These are not related to the leak of Aug. 18, but are of a record-keeping nature," he explained.

He said the violations were minor and not subject to penalties.

The maximum fine for a serious violation of AEC rules is a \$5,000 fine, Allen said.



Sierra Club

October 9, 1973

Agenda
Oklahoma City Group
Executive Committee

- I. Call to order
- II. Approval of Agenda
- III. Secretary Report and approval of minutes
- IV. Treasurer's Report
- V. Standing Committee reports
 - A. Program--K. Sohler
 - B. Mini-Outings--L. Humphrey
 - C. Membership--P. Hurst
 - D. Publicity
 - E. Conservation--See VIII
- VI. Old business
 - A. Red Rock Canyon survey--Mike Bowen
- VII. New Business
 - A. Elections--W. Jennings
 - B.
 - C.
- VIII. Conservation
 - A. Plutonium Plant--I. Youngheim
 - B. Public Service Company hearing--I. Youngheim
 - C. Stripmining bill S. 425--W. Jennings
 - D.
 - E.
- IX. Conclusions and Comments--W. Jennings
 - A. Time place and date of next meeting
 - B.
 - C.

* NOISE PLANT FOR ENCLAS, OMAHA 13, 350000 CLUB COMMITTEE, OCT 9, 1973
OKLAHOMA CITY, OCT 3, 1973