



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

May 13, 1994

CHAIRMAN

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman, Chairman
Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Regulation
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the Commission, I am responding to your April 20, 1994 letter which urged the Commission to revise its current policy regarding the availability of potassium iodide (KI) in the event of an emergency at a nuclear power plant. Current Federal policy, which was formulated in 1985 by an umbrella group of about 15 Federal agencies, recommends the stockpiling or distribution of KI during emergencies for emergency workers and institutionalized persons but does not recommend requiring predistribution or stockpiling for the general public. The Commission has considered this issue carefully and at great length, including all of the factors and details mentioned in your letter.

The Commission believes that the circumstances which would call for the availability of potassium iodide (KI) are very remote. We also recognize, as you observed, that the costs of stockpiling a supply of KI for all people who live within a five mile radius of a nuclear power plant are relatively low. However, the Commission does not believe that the stockpiling of KI is necessary to protect the public health and safety, and in the absence of a clear-cut regulatory justification, the Commission has been unable to agree to recommend a change to the current Federal policy.

While the current policy does not recommend requiring predistribution or stockpiling for the general public, it neither encourages nor discourages State and local authorities choosing to make KI available. Therefore State and local officials may make their own decisions based on local conditions and preferences. As you noted, some states have plans to distribute, or have distributed, KI to people living near power plants within those states.

For your information, I am enclosing a copy of the May 13, 1994 press release that the NRC issued on this matter. The Commission appreciates your interest in the use of KI.

Sincerely,

Ivan Selin

Enclosure:
As stated

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PDR COMMS NRCC
CORRESPONDENCE PDR

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

May 13, 1994

CHAIRMAN

The Honorable Alan K. Simpson
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Regulation
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Simpson:

On behalf of the Commission, I am responding to your April 20, 1994 letter which urged the Commission to revise its current policy regarding the availability of potassium iodide (KI) in the event of an emergency at a nuclear power plant. Current Federal policy, which was formulated in 1985 by an umbrella group of about 15 Federal agencies, recommends the stockpiling or distribution of KI during emergencies for emergency workers and institutionalized persons but does not recommend requiring predistribution or stockpiling for the general public. The Commission has considered this issue carefully and at great length, including all of the factors and details mentioned in your letter.

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Sincerely,

Ivan Selin

Enclosure:
As stated



UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Friday, May 13, 1994)

NRC WILL NOT RECOMMEND A CHANGE IN FEDERAL POLICY REGARDING STOCKPILING OF POTASSIUM IODIDE

After an extensive reassessment, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will not be recommending a change in Federal policy on distribution of potassium iodide near nuclear power plants. Current Federal policy, which was formulated in 1985 by an umbrella group of about 15 Federal agencies, recommends the stockpiling or distribution of potassium iodide during emergencies for persons who are assisting with emergency actions and institutionalized persons, but does not recommend predistribution or stockpiling for the general public.

If taken immediately before or at the time of exposure resulting from a serious nuclear accident, potassium iodide can be an effective means of blocking the uptake of radioactive iodine by the human thyroid. However, any significant release of radioactive material would also include radioactive elements other than iodine for which potassium iodide would not provide protection.

The NRC believes that in the event of a serious accident, evacuation is by far the best response. But the Commission said it would not object if the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the states or local authorities wish to develop and support a potassium iodide program. Two states currently maintain potassium iodide stockpiles.

All four Commissioners agreed that the circumstances which would call for the availability of potassium iodide are "very remote," and that the cost of purchasing a KI stockpile for all those living within a five-mile radius of nuclear power plants is relatively low.

In the absence of a clear-cut regulatory justification, however, the Commissioners did not agree among themselves to recommend a change to existing Federal policy. Thus that policy, which neither encourages nor discourages state or local governments choosing to stockpile the drug for the use of the general public, remains in effect. Commissioner Kenneth C. Rogers said that in his view, for the use of potassium iodide by state or local governments to be a viable option, it would be "prudent" for the U.S. government to assure the availability of a supply of the drug.

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