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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6178

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April 20, 1994

The Honorable Ivan Selin
 Chairman
 U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
 Washington, DC 20555

Dear Chairman Selin:

We are writing to urge the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to revise its current policy regarding the availability and use of potassium iodide (KI) in the event of an emergency at a nuclear power plant.

The NRC's current policy is that state and local governments should consider stockpiling KI for emergency use by emergency workers and institutionalized persons, but not for the general public. This policy was established in the early 1980's. Since that time, however, new information has arisen and additional experience has been gained on the costs and benefits of the prophylactic use of KI by the general population. We believe that this new information and experience requires a new approach to this issue.

It is well-established scientifically that KI is extremely effective in preventing the uptake of radioactive iodine by the thyroid. If taken in the proper dose prior to exposure to radioactive iodine, KI can completely block the uptake of the radioactive iodine.

The distribution of KI to the general population in the event of a nuclear emergency is a widely accepted protective measure. The World Health Organization has recommended its use for people living near a nuclear power plant if radiation levels are expected to exceed a predetermined dose. A number of foreign governments--including the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Canadian provinces with nuclear power plants, and the former Soviet Union--stockpile KI for distribution to and use by the general public in the event of a nuclear emergency. In the U.S., three states--Alabama, Tennessee, and Arizona--have plans to distribute or already have distributed KI to people living near one or more nuclear power plants within those states.

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 PDR COMMS NRCC
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A recent cost-benefit study of this issue conducted for the NRC indicates that the costs of stockpiling KI for people who live within five miles of a nuclear power plant are minimal--approximately ten cents per person per year. This means that for a typical population of 10,000 people living within five miles of a nuclear power plant, it would cost approximately \$1,000 to make KI available for distribution. The NRC staff projects that the cost of stockpiling KI for everyone in the country within five miles of a nuclear power plant would be on the order of several hundred thousand dollars per year. This is only a small fraction of the expenses already spent on emergency planning. As the NRC staff has noted, "[c]osts in this range present no significant barrier to stockpiling and are probably less than the cost of the continued studies."

Some concern has been expressed that public education on the use of KI may result in a potentially significant negative public perception. However, no evidence has been provided that any of the existing policies in other nations or in the states that provide for the use of KI by the general population has caused any undue panic or apprehension to the general public. Moreover, the federal government has a moral responsibility to provide the public with complete and accurate information regarding the risks from federally-licensed activities and ways in which those risks may be reduced.

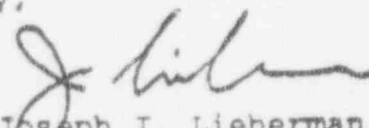
In sum, therefore, KI can be an extremely effective countermeasure to prevent damage to the thyroid in the event of a radiological emergency. It can also be made available for the general population living near a nuclear power plant for minimal costs. The NRC should revise its policy to provide this additional potential protective measure for nuclear emergency planning.

We thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Alan K. Simpson
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Clean Air
and Nuclear Regulation



Joseph I. Lieberman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Clean Air
and Nuclear Regulation

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2. TYPE OF DOCUMENT Correspondence Hearings (Qs/As)

3. DOCUMENT CONTROL Sensitive (NRC Only) Non-sensitive

4. CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE and SUBCOMMITTEES (if applicable)

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