



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

November 7, 1994

Mr. Troy Van Lienden
2901 Bill McDonald Pkway
Apt. #131
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Mr. Van Lienden:

I am writing in response to your recent request for information on the management of radioactive waste in the United States. Currently, regulatory responsibility for radioactive waste in the U.S. is shared by several entities. As such, I thought it might be helpful to summarize the responsibilities of the different agencies involved in the management of radioactive waste in the U.S.

Under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regulates the civilian uses of certain nuclear materials (called source, special nuclear and byproduct material) in the United States. NRC's mission is to protect the public health and safety, the environment, and the common defense and security. NRC accomplishes this mission through: licensing nuclear facilities and the possession, use and disposal of nuclear materials; the development and implementation of guidance and requirements governing licensed activities; and inspection and enforcement activities to ensure compliance with these requirements. Some States have entered into an agreement with the NRC to regulate source, special nuclear, and byproduct material at non-Federal facilities within their borders, in lieu of NRC. These States are referred to as Agreement States. Washington has entered into one of these agreements with NRC and, as such, source, byproduct, and small quantities of special nuclear material are regulated by the Washington Department of Health in your state.

Other federal agencies are also involved in the management of radioactive waste. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has regulatory responsibility for establishing radiation levels in the environment, including the establishment of criteria for exposure to the public from the disposal of radioactive material. EPA also has regulatory responsibility for, among other things, protecting humans and the environment from hazardous waste and toxic materials, and naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORM), such as radon. EPA regulates the management of hazardous waste under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), the cleanup of sites contaminated with hazardous waste and NORM under the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (also called "Superfund"), and the toxic materials under the Toxic Substances Control Act. EPA also has programs allowing State agencies to assume regulatory oversight responsibility in lieu of the Federal program. Finally, the Department of Energy (DOE) regulates the use and disposal of radioactive material at DOE sites and is responsible for siting, building, and operating a deep geologic repository for high-level waste.

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T. Van Lienden

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I have enclosed several pamphlets and brochures that discuss the management of low-level radioactive waste, mixed waste and high-level radioactive waste in the U.S., as well as additional information on NRC and its mission. Information on EPA's and DOE's radiation programs may be obtained by contacting the groups listed in these documents. In addition, the League of Women Voters has prepared a pamphlet entitled, "The Nuclear Waste Primer" that may provide you with additional information. I suggest you call the League's Washington office at (202) 331-4122 to inquire about obtaining a copy.

I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any further questions about the NRC's requirements for radioactive waste management, please call me at (301) 415-6749.

Sincerely,

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Dominick A. Orlando, Project Manager
Low-Level Waste and decommissioning
Projects Branch
Division of Waste Management
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards

Enclosures: As stated

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