EDO Principal Correspondence Control

FROM: DUE: 07/19/00

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DOC DT: 06/04/00
FINAL REPLY:

Jeff Syrop
Hayward, California
(White House Referral)

TO:

Pres. Clinton

FOR SIGNATURE OF : ** GRN ** CRC NO: 00-0439

Kane, NMSS

DESC:

Use of Radioactive Scrap Metal in Consumer Products

ROUTING:

Travers
Paperiello
Miraglia
Norry
Craig
Burns/Cyr

DATE: 07/06/00

ASSIGNED TO: CONTACT:

NMSS Kane

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS OR REMARKS:

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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ACTION OFFICE:	EDO		
AUTHOR:	JEFF SYRIO		
AFFILIATION:	CA		
ADDRESSEE:	WILLIAM CLINTON		
SUBJECT:	USE OF RADIOACTIVE SCRAP METAL IN CONSUMER PRODUCTS...		
ACTION:	Direct Reply		
DISTRIBUTION:			
LETTER DATE:	06/04/2000		
ACKNOWLEDGED	No		
SPECIAL HANDLING:	WHITE HOUSE REFERRAL FM HELEN CASTLEMAN DATED 6/30/2000		
NOTES:			
FILE LOCATION:	ADAMS		
DATE DUE:	07/19/2000	**DATE SIGNED:**	

Jeff Syrop

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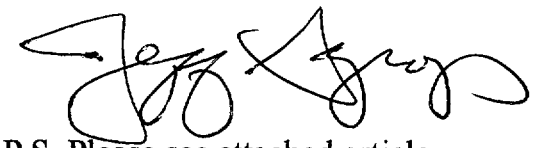
June 4, 2000

President William Jefferson Clinton
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Clinton,

It is stuff that nobody wants: thousands of tons of slightly radioactive scrap metal that is piling up for disposal at nuclear reactors and laboratories in California and around the nation. But I just learned that, under a scenario being discussed by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission, this tainted byproduct may eventually be headed for American households—in the form of thousands of consumer products made from recycled metals. When you get in your car or use a spoon, you don't want to have to think about whether it's contaminated with radioactivity or not. I hope you can make some strong statement and take some strong action against this practice. Though it will save millions of dollars in disposal costs, recycling the millions of tons of metal used in the many nuclear plants slated to be decommissioned in the next few years will risk contaminating steel plants and risk giving Americans the equivalent of one chest X-ray a year—for each "acceptable" piece of slightly radioactive metal. That could add up to a lot of X-rays in a lifetime. Would you like to have 70 extra chest X-rays in your life? I hate to even have one if I can avoid it. So, off to play tennis on this beautiful Sunday morning.

Take care,



P.S. Please see attached article

Sunday, September 19, 1999 By Erin McCormick, *San Francisco Examiner*

. . . .

At a meeting in San Francisco Wednesday and Thursday, the federal agency posed the question of whether radioactively contaminated metals, which now must go to low level nuclear waste dumps, should be recycled into products ranging from the steel girders used to build bridges, to baby carriages, frying pans and wedding rings.

Nuclear industry representatives, who want to minimize the high cost of getting rid of nuclear materials, say it is possible to ensure that any metal their industry releases for recycling is so slightly radioactive that its effect on public health would be negligible.

But anti-nuclear groups and environmentalists charge that such recycling could expose millions of unknowing consumers to increased risks of cancer caused by radiation.

Opponents of the idea, including many steel manufacturers, warn that the radiation would most likely end up in such common items as zippers, tin food cans or the silverware Americans use to eat their dinner.

"When you get in your car or use a spoon, you don't want to have to think about whether it's contaminated with radioactivity or not," said Tom Danjczek, president of the national Steel Manufacturers Association, who noted that about half the steel currently used in this country was made from recycled scrap.

In the next 30 years, many of the nation's nuclear power plants will be decommissioned. A study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates they will leave behind 600,000 tons of metal -- ranging from copper wires and steel pipes to huge pieces of machinery -- that have been exposed to low levels of radiation.

Since it costs thousands of dollars to bury a single barrel of low-level radioactive waste, there are huge financial incentives for finding other ways of disposing of potentially contaminated materials.

"There are some economic reasons to recycle this stuff," said Breck Henderson, spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. "In your power bill part of what you pay for is the decommissioning of nuclear power plants. ..... If you can shave millions of dollars off the cost, that saves the taxpayers money."

Routine radiation

The commission has completed a study designed to find a way to gauge what dose of radiation people would receive if, for instance, they spent long work days at metal office desks made from steel with slight radioactive contamination.

Agency officials point out that people are already bombarded with radiation that occurs in nature or exists as fallout from such nuclear incidents as the bombing of Hiroshima. They say the goal is to determine whether radiation in recyclable materials would be released in such low levels, it would make virtually no difference to health.

"Part of this is defining what is a small enough difference that it effectively isn't any more (radiation,)" said Don Cool, director of industrial and medical nuclear safety for the federal agency.

The agency is considering three limits. The highest would place the maximum allowable dose from any recycled metal at 10 millirems a year for any member of the public, including scrap metal workers who would handle the materials. That's the equivalent of one chest X-ray.

Acceptability questioned

But anti-nuclear activists argue that every bit of radiation a person receives increases the chance of contracting cancer.

"I don't think the American public is going to want to buy products that give them the equivalent of an extra chest X-ray every year," said Dan Hirsch, president of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, a Los Angeles environmental group that focuses on nuclear issues.

"They're talking about giving you 70 extra chest X-rays in your lifetime," he said. "I don't think that's acceptable."

The federal commission plans to hold meetings around the country to gather public and industry comment the question of recycling radioactive metals.

Other options are also being considered, according to Cool, including not recycling radioactive materials at all or restricting the types of things radioactive recycled metals can be used for.

National standard sought

Since there is some radiation in almost everything -- from the bricks used in buildings to the inner workings of the human body -- many in the nuclear industry argue there should be a nationally agreed upon standard for how much radiation an item used in a nuclear facility can contain and still be considered "clean."

"We don't want a standard that would jeopardize public health, but there should be a national standard set," said Scott Peterson, spokesman for the National Energy Institute, which represents the interests of nuclear power plants.

Current rules allow the government to release some slightly contaminated materials for recycling and public use on a case by case basis.

For instance, in 1994, the Energy Department authorized the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory to send 140 tons of copper wire slightly contaminated with radioactive Cobalt-60 to a local scrap metal recycler. Environmental reports reasoned that, even if the copper were used to make jewelry worn on people's wrists, it would have only a minute chance of giving anyone cancer.

In a far more controversial example of nuclear metals recycling, workers at the government-owned Paducah uranium processing plant in Kentucky are charging in a federal lawsuit that the plant failed to properly screen the radiation levels in bits of gold that were taken out of nuclear warheads and recycled into gold bars and ingots.

The steel industry, which recycles 55 million tons of metal each year by melting down scrap to reform it into usable products, has had some troubling experiences with radiation. The industry maintains a "zero tolerance" level for allowing radioactive contaminants into its steel smelters, but it has been plagued by illegal dumping of radioactive materials.

Hidden materials

On numerous occasions highly-radioactive nuclear source materials, such as devices used to power X-ray machines, have been hidden inside loads of steel dumped at scrap yards. In a few cases they were accidentally melted down in steel mills, forcing owners to shut down their plants and spend millions of dollars cleaning up.

One of these improperly dumped nuclear sources was discovered last year in a junked car delivered to the Schnitzer steel yard in Oakland, according to federal documents. The yard's radiation detectors discovered it before it caused any problems.

U.S. steel manufacturers say they have spent millions of dollars on radiation detectors to prevent these problems. They worry that if they were asked to recycle radioactively contaminated materials, they would have a hard time telling which loads were officially deemed safe and which weren't. "They want the steel industry to put this in our furnaces. What happens if our equipment gets contaminated?" said Lenard Robinson, environmental safety manager for TAMCO, a Southern California company that recycles steel to make rebar used in construction. "Suppose our product comes out a little radioactive. The federal government is not offering any kind of indemnification. It's pretty scary."

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

6.30.00
DATE

MEMORANDUM

FOR: NRC 1

FROM: HELEN S. CASTLEMAN H.S.C.
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF AGENCY LIAISON

SUBJECT: REFERRAL OF WHITE HOUSE BULK MAIL

Thank you for your continued hard work in ensuring responses to the Presidential letters and inquiries forwarded to your agency. The volume of mail that the President and Mrs. Clinton receive still remains unprecedented.

Please return any misreferrals to me at the following address:

Mrs. Helen S. Castleman
Director, Office of Agency Liaison
Room 6, OEOB
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20502

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 202/456-7486.

Thank you very much.