

April 12, 2001

COMJSM-01-0001

MEMORANDUM TO: Chairman Meserve  
Commissioner Dicus  
Commissioner Diaz  
Commissioner McGaffigan

FROM: Jeffrey S. Merrifield /RA/

SUBJECT: COORDINATION WITH MEXICO AND CANADA

Over the last several years, I have become aware of several regulatory issues of mutual concern to Canada, Mexico, and the United States. I propose that senior staff conduct a trilateral meeting with representatives from the Canadian Nuclear Safety Committee (CNSC) and the Commission National de Seguridad Nuclear y Salvaguardias (CNSNS) to exchange information on material issues which may be of mutual safety concern. I believe this could be a recurring exchange on some, as of yet, undefined periodicity (perhaps yearly or every other year). I believe a periodic trilateral meeting would serve to improve our relationship with our closest neighbors in case other, unforeseen issues may arise.

I am particularly concerned about the lack of consistency in the United States of notifying either Canada or Mexico of lost or stolen sources near their respective borders with the United States and the lack of notification to the United States of similar lost or stolen sources that could arrive in the United States. Such events are of significant safety importance for large sources and for smaller sources could create significant economic issues if they were inadvertently recycled. During a recent visit to Mexico, the then head of the Commission National de Seguridad Nuclear y Salvaguardias (CNSNS) informed me that one of the most significant radiation exposures in Mexico's history was the result of a stolen source from the United States. Therefore, I believe that one topic that should be addressed in the initial meeting is a process or procedure for appropriate notification when sources are lost or stolen near the appropriate borders. The purpose of this notification is to aid in identifying and retrieving lost or stolen sources and returning the sources to their rightful owners.

I recognize that my proposal could have potential resource implications, but my desire is to reduce those resource implications to the minimum possible. For example, I am not proposing a formal agreement between the three countries. Rather, I am proposing an informal arrangement between the three regulatory agencies. As a more specific example, concerning the issue of a notification process for lost or stolen sources, the notification could be by informal mechanisms, such as a telephone call or an e-mail between designated agency officials. There are other details on the notification process, including addressing the safety and economic significance of the lost source, which need to be resolved at the staff level. I believe the staff should initiate discussions with appropriate officials in Mexico and Canada and, based on those discussions, inform the Commission of the identified issues of mutual concern and potential resource implications of continuing the process. If a reasonably effective informal program can be implemented for relatively low cost and it is of perceived benefit to all three countries, then periodic trilateral meetings can continue.

I realize that on a wider scale, the IAEA/NEA are proposing a mechanism for international exchange of information of significant events and that a paper will be presented shortly to the Commission on this effort. I would agree that world-wide notification of significant events is appropriate. But my proposal is for increased cooperation with our closest international neighbors of any appropriate lost or stolen source, which may or may not rise to the world-wide notification level. I also believe that regardless of agreements we may reach on an international level to improve world-wide communication, we should make a special effort regarding our closest neighbor.

SECY please track.

cc: EDO  
OGC  
OCA  
SECY