National Nuclear Security Administration

Department of Energy
National Nuclear Security Administration
Washington, DC 20585

May 29, 2009

The Honorable Kristine L. Svinicki
Commissioner
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

Dear Commissioner Svinicki,

I would like to take this opportunity to follow up with you on a question you posed to Abigail Cuthbertson of my staff following her presentation at the April 17, 2009 public Commission meeting on low-level radioactive waste. You asked how long it takes for a source to be recovered once it has been registered on the Global Threat Reduction Initiative's (GTRI) Off-Site Source Recovery Project (OSRP) database (osrp.lanl.gov) and whether we had a metric associated with our recovery time. Abby responded that while we do track this, we have no associated internal metric.

We have followed up on your question and can now share with you some additional information. Since GTRI began tracking registration dates in 2004, it has taken an average of 103 days to recover actinide sources (i.e. Am-241, Pu-238, and Pu-239). For beta/gamma sources greater than 10 curies (i.e. Co-60 and Cs-137), the average recovery time has been 213 days. In both cases we prioritize the recoveries according to a prioritization scheme based on national security considerations and the curie level. We have coordinated closely with NRC staff in the development of this prioritization scheme. As Abby mentioned during her remarks, the expiration of many Type B container certificates on October 1, 2008 has made the recovery of the large beta/gamma devices more challenging. As a result, we are likely to see recovery times for these devices grow until certified replacement containers become available. Over the next few years, the NRC can help alleviate this situation through expedited review of the Safety Analysis Reports submitted by companies currently developing replacement containers.

As Abby mentioned during the question and answer session, beta/gamma sources that are less than 10 curies are generally collected through the Conference of Radiation Control Program Directors (CRCPD) Source Collection and Threat Reduction (SCATR) project. CRCPD recovers sources as part of their round-ups. Collection time-frames across the country depend on State participation and access to commercial disposal facilities. The closure of Barnwell to out-of-compact waste has had a significant impact on CRCPD's ability to respond to the registration of disused

sources registered on the OSRP website in the 36 states without disposal access. Debbie Gilley spoke about these concerns during her presentation at the same meeting.

I appreciate your interest in GTRI's source recovery activities. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our project and disposal-related concerns.

Sincerely,

Andrew Bieniawski
Assistant Deputy Administrator for
Global Threat Reduction

cc:
Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko
Commissioner Dale E. Klein
Commissioner Peter B. Lyons