

UNITED STATES
ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20545

Ext 900 / Nuclear

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OFFICE OF GOVERNOR

Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
Governor of Idaho
Boise, Idaho 83702

Dear Governor Andrus:

Thank you for the October 5, 1973, telegram from you and Senator Church concerning the Commission's present and future use of the National Reactor Testing Station as a site for the storage of radioactive waste.

I assure you and the people of Idaho that no action will be taken by the Commission regarding the storage of radioactive waste which can possibly result in a public hazard or insult to the environment, and that steps will be taken on a timely basis to eliminate any possible source of hazard or environmental insult which might result from past Commission practices. This is a fundamental objective which we follow in all of our activities, regardless of location.

In regard to your request for written response to three specific points; namely:

- "1. That except for the limited purposes of fuel reprocessing and calcining of waste the storage facility of the NRTS will not in any way be expanded or used for the storage of atomic wastes from sources which have not previously utilized the NRTS site."

The NRTS site is uniquely suited from the standpoint of site characteristics, available facilities and equipment, and available trained personnel for safe surface or near-surface retrievable storage of certain types of waste which have been routinely generated in the past at certain AEC facilities and which will be generated in the future at other AEC facilities. I am sure you appreciate that we must make maximum efficient use of all of our sites, facilities and manpower so long as such utilization does not in any way endanger the health and safety of the public or produce an unacceptable impact on the environment.

All waste at the NRTS has been, and will continue to be, managed in a manner to assure that the health and safety of the public will not be endangered. Since 1970, all plutonium contaminated waste at the NRTS has been retrievably stored in discrete packages designed to retain their integrity for at least twenty years under the NRTS weather conditions. Prior to 1970, plutonium contaminated waste was buried at

the NRTS in packages which did not always meet this integrity criterion, but our monitoring program has shown that the radioactivity in this early waste has not migrated from its place of burial. Even so, in accord with a commitment made by Dr. Seaborg several years ago, we now have a program under way to engineer the equipment and to start exhumation and repackaging of this material within the next several years.

"2. That the AEC assure us and the people of Idaho that the National Reactor Testing Station is in no way being considered as a site for the permanent or the extended "interim" storage of long-lived nuclear wastes in any form."

I can assure you that the NRTS is not being considered in any way as the site for permanent disposal of any long-lived nuclear waste. No decision has been made concerning the location for the Retrievable Surface Storage Facility which we plan to build for the solidified commercial high-level radioactive waste.

Wherever the facility is located, it will be designed, constructed and operated in a manner which will assure that the radioactive inventory will not be released by equipment failure, human error, overt or covert actions by man, or natural phenomena.

Further, before any decision is made in this matter, the public will be given full opportunity, through an Environmental Impact Statement, Congressional Authorization and Appropriation hearing, etc., to thoroughly review the safety considerations and to raise any and all questions it may have concerning the ability of the facility to give full protection to the health and safety of the public and to the environment.

"3. That all efforts are being exerted by the Atomic Energy Commission to assure the procurement and development of a safe and acceptable national atomic waste repository, not located over a vital water resource such as the Snake Plain Aquifer, so that long-lived radioactive wastes currently in interim storage at the National Reactor Testing Station can be removed for permanent storage at the earliest possible date in line with promises made by the AEC to begin preparations for the removal of such wastes from the NRTS burial ground by the end of this decade."

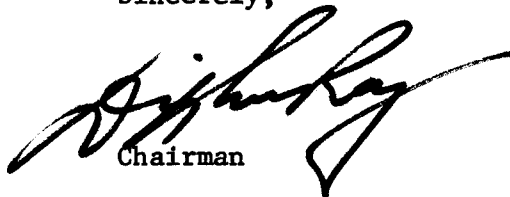
As I noted in my response to your first point, the Commission has a positive program to develop and implement the techniques needed to treat, package and permanently dispose of the plutonium contaminated waste now stored at NRTS, including that previously buried in the

trenches at that site. The schedule of this program recognizes our commitment to be ready to start moving this waste from that site by the end of the decade.

In closing, I reiterate that we have no plans to use the NRTS as a permanent disposal site for the plutonium contaminated and other very long-lived nuclear wastes with which you are concerned. All our interim storage activities at the NRTS will be guided by the principle that the Snake Plain Aquifer must be fully protected against all possibility of radioactive contamination. I further assure you that you and the people of Idaho will be kept completely informed on all of our plans for waste management at the NRTS, and we will certainly do nothing that would in any way be detrimental to the overall best interests of the State of Idaho.

I am sending this same letter to Senator Church, and if I can be of further assistance to you in this matter, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Chairman

cc: Senator James A. McClure
Representative Orval Hansen
Representative Steven D. Symms