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October 9, 2002

Mr. Steve Zappe  
New Mexico Environment Department  
2905 Rodeo Park Drive East, Building 1  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

2002

Dear Mr. Zappe:

The Department of Energy (DOE) is seeking authorization to ship remote handled transuranic (RH-TRU) waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant as part of the department's effort to accelerate the disposition of legacy waste. To obtain authorization to ship RH-TRU waste DOE has submitted a request for a Class 3 modification to Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB) would like to take this opportunity to comment on the proposed Class 3 modification to the WIPP.

Oak Ridge has the largest percentage of the 3,800 cubic meters of defense related RH-TRU waste in the DOE complex, therefore the ORSSAB has a vested interest in the acceptance of this proposed permit modification by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED). If approved the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit class 3 modification would allow the management, storage and disposal of remote-handled transuranic (RH-TRU) waste at WIPP and we offer these comments in support of its acceptance:

- RH handled TRU waste for the WIPP constitutes only 14 % of the total curie activity in DOE's TRU inventory and the effects of radionuclides with greater than 20 year half-life is two orders of magnitude lower than that in the contact handled transuranic (CH-TRU) waste.
- The Land Withdrawal Act of 1992 allows the disposal in WIPP of up to 175, 564 cubic meters of TRU waste, including 7,080 cubic meters of RH- TRU waste. The estimated inventory of RH-TRU waste in the DOE complex is well this level.
- DOE's proposed performance based Characterization Plan for RH-TRU waste incorporates visual examination, acceptable knowledge, and analysis, which will meet the EPA and NMED requirements for characterization. And the preliminary assessment analyses show that the characteristics of RH-TRU waste will have a negligible impact on the potential long-term release of radionuclides into the environment.
- At the Oak Ridge site, Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), a privatized RH/CH-TRU waste treatment facility for characterization and repackaging is in construction to be meet the proposed waste characterization plan.

The Department of Energy's crosscutting approach of accelerated legacy waste disposition will result in reduced risk to the public and the environment. It is the ORSSAB hope that NMED will accept this permit modification and allow shipment of RH-TRU waste to the WIPP.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Bonner

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