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1215 Harper Place
Knoxville, TN 37922

October 25, 2002

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

Dear Mr. Zappe:

Endorsement of Remote-Handled Transuranic Waste Permit Modification Request

We would like to comment on the proposed permit modification that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is seeking in order to ship remote-handled transuranic (RH-TRU) waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). To obtain authorization to ship this waste, DOE has submitted a request for a Class 3 modification to the WIPP Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) permit.

Oak Ridge has the largest percentage of the 3800 cubic meters of defense-related RH-TRU waste in the DOE complex. Oak Ridge also has relatively high annual rainfall levels and shallow, inter-connected aquifers, making it an unsuitable location for the indefinite storage and disposal of RH-TRU wastes. Therefore, the citizens of Oak Ridge and the surrounding area have a vested interest in the acceptance by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) of this permit modification request. If approved, the RCRA permit modification would allow the management, storage, and disposal of mixed RH-TRU waste at WIPP.

We offer these comments in support of the proposed request:

- RH-TRU waste constitutes only 14% of the total curie activity in DOE's TRU inventory, and the effects of the radionuclides (greater than 20 year half-life) associated with this waste are two orders of magnitude lower than that in the contact-handled transuranic (CH-TRU) waste.
- 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.
- 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 below this level, and final disposal volumes will be further reduced by treatment.

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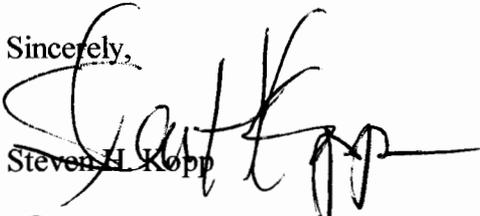


- DOE's proposed RH-TRU waste characterization plan is performance based and includes the acceptable knowledge process, visual examination, radiography, and characterization at time of packaging. Use of these tools, in combination when appropriate, will ensure that WIPP waste acceptance criteria will be met and items indicating presence of hazardous constituents or prohibited items of concern to safe management of the RH-TRU waste will be identified.
- The RH-TRU wastes from Oak Ridge will all be characterized and repackaged in a specially designed processing facility. The wastes processed in this facility should meet or exceed the waste acceptance criteria proposed in the Class 3 RCRA permit modification request.

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

We are pleased to have this opportunity to provide input and look forward to learning how our comments will be addressed in action on the RH-TRU waste permit modification request.

Sincerely,



Steven H. Kopp



Delores K. Kopp