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To	Steve Zappa	From	SUSAN H. FISHER
Co./Dept.	NMED	Co.	CCMS
Phone #		Phone #	
Fax #	827-1944	Fax #	

WIPP File

July 10, 1995

Mr. Mark Weidler, Secretary
 New Mexico Environment Dep't.
 P.O. Box 26110
 Santa Fe, N.M. 87502

Dear Mr. Weidler,

As citizens of New Mexico and representatives of organizations who have been involved with the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) for several years, we would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation of your openness to involving the public in the decisions that affect the future of our state.

The Department of Energy's (DOE) application for a Hazardous Waste Permit for waste disposal at WIPP evokes great interest and concern among New Mexicans. The conditions of the draft Hazardous Waste Permit issued by NMED depend on information DOE presents in its application. We respectfully request that NMED open a dialogue process with the public about DOE's application. We believe that such dialogue early on in the application process can bring to light potential deficiencies which can then undergo full and open discussion. Through this dialogue, we hope to work with NMED to bring about an application review which is informed, thorough and critical.

There is historical precedent for such dialogue. When DOE submitted its Hazardous Waste Permit application for WIPP in 1993, NMED recognized the importance of public involvement, and opened the process to public review. In November, 1993, Secretary Espinosa ordered informal public meetings to be held, during which the public was able to comment on DOE's draft application for a test phase permit.

In addition to these meetings, NMED provided documentation to the public about the NMED contractor's (A.T. Kearney) comments to DOE on the application and DOE's responses to those comments. NMED also provided an opportunity for meetings between the contractor, reviewers and representatives of the public. Finally, NMED included DOE, Westinghouse, NMED personnel, Department of Justice representatives, and public groups in several open meetings to discuss DOE's proposal to modify rather than withdraw the WIPP test phase permit.



It is beneficial for all concerned for NMED to continue this history of open and informative dialogue among diverse groups concerned with WIPP. In order to do so, public comment should be solicited before issuance of a draft permit and public hearings on the permit. We recommend that public comment be solicited and public review be invited at the following points within the application process:

1. Once the draft application is submitted, the public should have the opportunity to comment on the technical completeness of the application.
2. Comments about the substantive merit of the application should be solicited after the technical completeness of the application is judged to be adequate.
3. Public review of comments made by A.T. Kearney.
4. Public review of the final pre-draft application.

This ongoing dialogue should provide a solid basis for communication about NMED's draft permit.

We offer the following additional recommendations:

1. NMED should not conduct private meetings with the applicant which preclude public involvement. Meetings and correspondence between NMED or its contractors and DOE regarding the application should be made public.
2. Schedules for meetings with the public should be announced in time for the public to plan and prepare. The public must have timely access to all relevant documentation in the most current versions available.

We appreciate your time and consideration in this matter, and look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Susan Hirshberg
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety

Don Hancock
Southwest Research and Information Center

Garland Harris
Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping