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November 14, 1997

The Honorable Al Alm
Assistant Secretary of Energy
for Environmental Management
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Ai:

I would like to again offer my appreciation for all you have done to help clean up the Department's nuclear weapons complex. I believe this one of the most difficult tasks the government faces, and I am grateful for the time and energy you have put in to base the clean-up program on a rational set of priorities.

I would also appreciate it if your office could answer the following requests for information:

Please identify the total amount of surplus U.S. plutonium by form (e.g., pits, metals, residues, etc), how much of it (by form) is suitable for processing into mixed oxide fuel (Mox), and how much of it (by form) is likely to be immobilized (vitrified). Please indicate how much of this surplus plutonium is addressed by the ROD discussed above, how much is addressed by the draft EIS mentioned in the next question, and how much will be addressed by other EIS's and identify those EIS's.

Please discuss what priority SRS currently has to forward waste on site to either WIPP or Yucca Mountain (or a temporary repository if Congress enacts legislation over the Administration's objections). Please discuss specifically what priority SRS materials receive as compared to other DOE sites (Hanford, Oak Ridge, Rocky Flats, INEL, etc.).

Please provide the timetable for transporting plutonium metals and oxides from Rocky Flats to the Savannah River Site per the Record of Decision (ROD) completed this past January. If possible, please include the approximate amounts shipped to Savannah River Site per year or other appropriate measure.

Please provide any alternatives the Department may be considering to accelerate the shipments of plutonium metals and oxides per the same ROD, or modifications to the ROD, and discuss:

(I) what the Department would have to do at SRS to accommodate the acceleration and the costs involved with these changes (broken out by fiscal year);

(II) what cost savings the Department could expect at Rocky Flats by each acceleration alternative (broken out by fiscal year). If the cost savings at Rocky Flats is dependent on other variables, such as residues, please discuss these variables; and

(III) If modifications to the ROD are required, what are the nature of the changes.

Please provide a summary of the draft EIS for the Rocky Flats residues, including a time line that shows when and how much of this material will be transferred to SRS, what will need to occur at SRS to safely store and treat this material (including cost estimates broken out by fiscal year), the timeline at SRS for storage and treatment of this material, and the expected savings at Rocky Flats accrued by removal of this material.

Please discuss how much material at Hanford, Los Alamos, and other sites under DOE control may be transferred to SRS, and identify any existing or draft EIS's (or other evaluations) that discuss any such options. To the maximum extent practicable, include details about the nature of the material, the amounts, possible time lines for shipping the material to SRS, the alternative treatment and/or storage options at SRS (including estimated costs broken out by fiscal year), and potential cost savings at Hanford, Los Alamos, and other relevant sites.

Please explain the ARIES process, its relationship to producing Mox, and alternatives to ARIES should it encounter developmental difficulties.

To the best extent practicable, please provide the cost and time schedules for developing a Mox production capability (including all associated subprocesses) and new vitrification capabilities needed to treat U.S. surplus plutonium. Also discuss the department's estimate of how long a Mox plant would operate, including an estimate of the how the amount of plutonium converted into Mox could affect the duration of the Mox plant's operation.

Please explain the waste streams, both nuclear and non-nuclear, that would result from producing Mox at SRS, and discuss treatment and storage options for these waste streams.

Is there funding programmed in DOE's budget for APT, Mox production, immobilization, and acceleration of waste from Rocky Flats to SRS?

Discuss the department's assumptions of the U.S. nuclear fuel market when it tries to sell or provide Mox fuel to utilities, and specifically discuss the effect that the blended down Russian HEU will have on this market.

I realize I am asking for a lot of information, but I believe this information is essential to understanding the costs and benefits of transferring surplus plutonium to SRS from other sites. Please direct all information and questions to Andrew Hunter of my personal staff.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Respectfully,

John M. Spratt, Jr.
Member of Congress

JMSj:hb/aph