



The McGovern Family  
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Dear Sirs,

As America is currently in the 30-day period of public comment about it, we are writing to you to express our concern over the system, to which the NRC has given tentative approval, to clean up 280,000 gallons of contaminated water at the Three Mile Island power plant's Unit 2 reactor preparatory to releasing the water. We understand that this treatment will remove the contaminated water's radioactive cesium and iodine content, but will leave the water's tritium content intact. Because of this fact, we must voice our opposition to any plan involving such a release of radioactive material, and must correspondingly urge all appropriate NRC officials to decide against the system's operation. We hold this opposition because of our interpretation of two widely held assurances usually voiced prior to or during nuclear releases as being misleading and not altogether justifiable, namely, that there is negligible danger presented to humans and the environment by releasing, respectively, "small" amounts of radioactive materials and the amounts whose emissions are below the local level of background radiation in various amounts.

Acknowledged by mail

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First, it will be a moot point whether or not large amounts of any radioactive substance are released into the environment should the food chain, et cetera, be affected by some, an occurrence which is as likely for small amounts of such substances as for large. This will apply if such an occurrence happens with this possible release of tritium, an element which can enter the food chain through the air or water, after which it can distribute in human's body water, its established "target organ" being the entire body. Since tritium has a half-life of 12.46 years, the chain of hazard to human and other life's health described above will be a concern (going by the rule-of-thumb that a radioactive element remains hazardous for 20 half-lives) for 249.20 years, and of course, will be a concern for substantially longer if/as more tritium is produced. Unfortunately, however, as has been pointed out by past analyses, the cells of a dead cancer victim will not indicate the cause of the cancer. This may be, and certainly is in our opinion, reason enough that we should do every thing in our power to obstruct the introduction into our environment of such possible carcinogens.

Secondly, we think it irrelevant to state that a particular radioactive emission is, luckily, below the local level of background radiation, because any emission adds to that level, thus imbalancing the ecology and posing an added danger to its organisms. That

naturally existing radiation is a health hazard is unquestionable, being a fact based, as it is, on estimates such as medical experts' that such radiation may be responsible for 32,000 cancer deaths a year; the National Academy of Sciences' that 220,000 people may die as a result of non-energy related radiation sources by the year 2000, and West German Research Minister Volker Hanff's that 208,000 Europeans will die of natural and medical radiation in the next 30 years. We feel that adding more radiation to the ecology can only be detrimental, tritium being a prime example as it is estimated to exist naturally only in a quantity of about two pounds. Also, the dangers posed to the food chain by even "insignificant" radioactive emissions have certainly been demonstrated by incidents such as that researched by Dr. Albert Schweitzer on May 18, 1975 (as reported by the Saturday Review of Literature) in which, though radioactivity in the water of the Columbia River, where plutonium wastes had been deposited, was insignificant, the radioactivity of the river plankton was 2,000 times higher, of the ducks eating the plankton was 40,000 times higher, of the Fish was 150,000 times higher, of the young suckers fed on insects caught by their parents in the river was 500,000 times higher, and of the egg yolks of water birds more than 1,000,000 times higher. So, a little radiation can relatively quickly magnify into a very undesirable environmental condition.

Finally, for the above and other reasons, we believe

that no further precedents and practice of reckless releases should take place, that we should stop existing trends of dumping in now and worrying later, or worse, not worrying at all but rather leaving future generations to worry. Since we are anti-nuclear, we might suggest that the answer to these trends is a nation-wide nuclear moratorium, and that it might be best to simply entomb Three Mile Island water and all, and leave it as a mausoleum of the nuclear age.

However, the major issue here is the health hazard posed by that water and the undebatable merit of efforts to prevent its release. Therefore, we once again emphasize that, until such time as there would be a system to remove all radioactive carcinogens from the water, the N.R.C. should perform this humanitarian service, as we are confident that any organization dedicated to human safety would be eager to do.

In confidence in your judgement and in the interests of nature,

*R. John Anderson*

Joanne McGovern

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Genus & the Green