

NOV 21 1979

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The Honorable Howard W. Cannon
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cannon:

Your letter of October 5, 1979, forwarded to us from the Department of Energy by letter of October 31, 1979, requested information concerning potential effects of a uranium mill tailings dam failure which occurred in Church Rock, New Mexico, on Lake Mead.

The stream into which tailings were spilled, the Rio Puerco, becomes dry at a point about 20 miles west of the New Mexico/Arizona border. Only during infrequent periods will there be any flow in portions of the Rio Puerco which connect with the Little Colorado and Colorado Rivers which in turn feed Lake Mead. An extensive monitoring program has been conducted on the stream by the State of New Mexico and the NRC. From the results of this program and location of the Rio Puerco, it is concluded that no contamination of Lake Mead will result from the Church Rock dam failure.

Also in response to your request, enclosed is testimony recently delivered by the NRC staff before the House Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs on October 22, 1979; this testimony gives a more complete description of the tailings dam failure.

I trust this information is responsive to your request. If you need additional assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Original signed by R. G. Smith *for*

Lee V. Gossick
Executive Director for Operations

Enclosure:
Testimony dtd 10/22/79 re
Church Rock dam failure

11/16/79

ELD
EGrammer via
11/16/79 phone

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