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Sheffield  
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The Honorable Adlai E. Stevenson  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Science,  
Technology, and Space  
Committee on Commerce, Science  
and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Your letter dated April 10, 1978 concerns a matter which may come before the Commission for review and therefore it would be inappropriate for the Commission to respond. However, I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the concerns expressed in your letter regarding the disposal of low-level radioactive waste and the Sheffield, Illinois, radioactive waste disposal site. First and foremost, I would like to state that there is no immediate threat to public health and safety due to the operation of the Sheffield site or any of the other commercial waste disposal sites. Nonetheless, the Commission shares your concerns and believes that improvements in low-level waste disposal are necessary. The Commission has already taken steps to develop and improve its regulatory program for low-level waste disposal.

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A copy of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Program (NUREG-0240) is enclosed for your information. As can be seen, the Commission has a number of studies underway or planned, and is developing regulations and criteria to address the specific concerns that you have mentioned. Among other topics, the program covers assessment of alternative disposal methods; development of criteria for siting, design and operation of low-level waste disposal sites; and technical and funding requirements for post-operational maintenance and monitoring programs. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is also coordinating its own studies with those of the States, private industry, and other Federal agencies such as the United States Geologic Survey (USGS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Energy (DOE). The studies are aimed at improving methods for siting and operating low-level waste disposal facilities.

In regard to the Sheffield site, the NRC and the Illinois Health Department are reviewing the adequacy of the site for future operation. In particular, the staff is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Sheffield site and public hearings before an Atomic Safety and Licensing Board are planned prior to any decision on whether to permit renewal of the Sheffield license and expansion of operations.

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The Honorable Adlai E. Stevenson - 2 -

You expressed concerns regarding current site operations, long-term care, sabotage and physical security, and liquid releases through migration. These areas are being specifically addressed in the EIS. The EIS is also addressing the impact of waste that has already been buried in the existing site, waste that would be buried in an expanded site, and possible mitigating measures that could be applied to correct site deficiencies, if such measures are found to be necessary. Exhumation of the waste is one such mitigating measure that could be considered. However, no public health and safety problem has been identified at this time which would require exhumation of the waste.

As part of our overall low-level waste program, we do plan to perform a risk assessment of the hazards involved with exhuming buried wastes and transporting the wastes to a new location. Another alternative that is being considered by NRC for long-term control of low-level radioactive wastes is Federal landownership for the currently licensed sites.

In summary, I believe that the NRC and the States are responsibly fulfilling their duty to protect the public health and safety in their regulation of the Sheffield and other low-level waste disposal sites. At all sites, inspections are routinely conducted and monitoring programs have been established which are designed to detect problems in time to take any needed corrective measures. Proceedings underway will determine the future of the Sheffield site. A comprehensive NRC program to upgrade shallow land burial is underway and is being coordinated with those Federal agencies having expertise that can be applied to improving waste disposal practices.

I hope that my letter has been responsive to your concerns. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

*[Signature]*

Lee V. Gossick  
Executive Director for Operations

Enclosure:  
NUREG-0240

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