

December 13, 1996

Mr. Thomas Rowland, Director
U. S. Department of Energy, Ohio Field Office
West Valley Demonstration Project
P.O. Box 191
West Valley, New York 14171

SUBJECT: U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION MONITORING VISIT
NOVEMBER 18-20, 1996

Dear Mr. Rowland:

On November 18-20, 1996, a monitoring visit was made to the Department of Energy (DOE) West Valley Demonstration Project site to review activities of West Valley Nuclear Services Company, Inc. (WVNS){a Westinghouse subsidiary}, the DOE contractor. Specifically, the purpose of the monitoring visit was to review the status of the contractor's program for the operation of the vitrification facility relative to its impact on public health and safety from a radiological standpoint. The monitoring visit was conducted by Mr. Todd Jackson, Project Engineer - West Valley, of this office. Details of this review are provided in Enclosure 1. Some of the individuals contacted during the visit are indicated in Enclosure 2.

As a result of this review, the monitor determined that the contractor has established and maintained controls, processes, and programs, which appear adequate to protect public health and safety. Through November 20, 1996, the contractor had produced 45 canisters of vitrified high-level radioactive waste.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact me at (610)337-5200.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By:
Ronald R. Bellamy

Ronald R. Bellamy, Ph.D., Chief
Decommissioning and Lab Branch
Division of Nuclear Materials Safety

Enclosures:

1. Review of the Project Status
2. Contact List

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T.R. Rowland, Director

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P. Piciulo, Program Director, Radioactive Waste Management Program
State of New York

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Dr. Paul L. Piciulo
Program Director
Radioactive Waste Management Program
New York State Energy Research
and Development Authority
West Valley Office
P. O. Box 191
West Valley, NY 14171-0191

ENCLOSURE 1

REVIEW OF THE PROJECT STATUS

The monitor observed selected activities in progress at the site, held discussions with cognizant DOE - West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) and contractor personnel (WVNS), and reviewed related documentation. The primary objective of this visit was to provide turnover and transition of responsibility for USNRC project monitoring at the WVDP from Joe Furia, NRC-Region I, to Todd Jackson, NRC-Region I, .

1.0 PROJECT STATUS OVERVIEW

DOE and the contractor presented updated status briefings on activities at the site, and introduced key personnel to Mr. Jackson. Presentations focused on:

- Operation of the Vitrification Facility

- Site History and Conditions

- Site Tour and Current Status

2.0 OPERATION OF THE VITRIFICATION FACILITY

Vitrification operations continued through this visit. As of November 20, 1996 WVNS was filling the 46th waste canister, had completed the welding and decontamination of 24 canisters, and had transferred 38 canisters to the Chemical Process Cell (CPC) for storage.

At the time of this monitoring visit, 15 high level waste transfers from Tank 8D-2 had been completed, the most recent on November 16, 1996. During the visit, the monitor was informed by DOE that an event had occurred on November 16, 1996 during the waste transfer, which had caused some of the liquid waste to enter a demineralized water line outside of the vitrification cell. The high level waste in the line outside of the shielded vitrification cell had caused a temporary increase in the radiation levels in the vicinity of the shield wall penetration. No personnel overexposures were known to be associated with the event. The monitor was informed that DOE would perform a complete investigation of the event and provide a copy of the report to the NRC. A preliminary occurrence report was received by NRC Region I on November 27, 1996, followed by the final report entitled "Independent DOE Investigation and Analysis of Unusual Occurrence (OH-WV-WVNS-1996-VFS-006)", dated November 27, 1996.

Following the monitoring visit, on November 22, 1996, WVNS put the vitrification system into "idle" pending a complete root-cause investigation of the unusual occurrence described above. The investigation was completed and vitrification operations were begun again on November 27, 1996.

On November 14, 1996 WVNS had successfully transferred mobilization pump 55-G-002 from Tank 8D-1 to riser M-4 Tank 8D-2. Addition of this pump, to replace failed pump 55-G-003 in riser M-3 of Tank 8-D-2, was expected to improve the ability to transfer high-level waste sludge from the bottom of Tank 8D-2 to the vitrification system.

The monitor observed the exterior of the completed CPC-Waste Storage Area structure. Construction of the structure had been completed shortly before this monitoring visit.

3.0 TRANSITION ENGINEERING

During the monitoring visit, it was reported by DOE that changes to the FY97 budget had caused some work schedules to be delayed regarding resolution of issues related to the plant head end cells (HEC). Precise impacts were not yet determined, although it was likely that some work would be deferred.

ENCLOSURE 2

1.0 Department of Energy - West Valley Demonstration Project

W. Hamel, Operations & Engineering Team Leader
T. Jackson, Safety, Health & QA Team Leader
B. Mazurowski, Deputy Director
R. Provencher, Associate Director for Operations and Safety
T. Rowland, Director

2.0 West Valley Nuclear Services, Inc.

J. Hummel, Quality Assurance Manager
R. Lawrence, Transition Projects Manager
J. Little, Executive Vice President
S. MacVean, Site Operations Manager
W. Poulson, President
P. Valenti, Vitrification Operations Manager
J. Volpe, Vice President for Environmental, Safety, Health & QA

3.0 State of New York

P. Piciulo, Program Director, NYSERDA

Note: Partial list of persons contacted.