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UNITED STATES
ENERGY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

710385

March 21, 1958

Mr. L. I. Strauss, Chairman
United States Atomic Energy Commission
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Strauss:

The 67th Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Biology and Medicine held at Los Alamos March 14 and 15 was attended by all members. The bio-medical program as conducted there is most stimulating and is carried on with due attention to those problems most pertinent to Los Alamos operations. The Commission can take pride in the quality and imagination with which the program is going forward and with facets dealing with peace-time uses of nuclear energy commensurate with the over-all program of the Laboratory.

In committee meeting there were three items bearing upon past subjects of our communications to you. Dr. G. Victor Beard related to us the information derived from his visit to Windscale, and we shall look forward with interest to the complete report by the AEC representatives who participated. Although AEC has thus far been free from such incidents, the development of industrial and power reactors can only add to the probability (however small) of such an occurrence. Of particular interest to us were the following:

1. Although a "disaster plan" had been formulated at Windscale, the incident when it occurred did not fit the operational plan as devised. Improvisation was done by coordination of various agencies, with many governmental functions involved.

2. There was not a radiation safety officer at hand when the accident was finally recognized. Local monitoring instrumentation was inadequate and was provided from the outside.

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3. Public health was the paramount concern. Public information was implemented to the greatest extent by all media.

The Windscale data when available should be thoroughly studied by all sites and contractors operating reactors. It may well contain lessons which may minimize the chance of accident and at the same time be useful in coping with an accident should it occur.

A review of the proposed bio-medical weapons test for 1960 again emphasized the need for re-computation of the weapons used in Japan. Dr. Alvin Graves, who participated in the discussions, indicated that this had not been done with the precision now available. The requirements for more accurate estimates of radiation exposures of persons being studied by the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission make it evident that any biomedical weapons test would be most profitable if a duplicate of the Hiroshima bomb could be used. And finally, in any such test, it was again urged that planning hold the number of weapons to an essential minimum through careful selection of desired information and coordination of planning.

The third item of the agenda which we had considered before was the problem of transportation and now military preparedness use of nuclear weapons, both in this country and abroad. You will recall that this formed the subject of a recommendation to the Commission following our 66th meeting. The joint public release by Department of Defense and AEC on February 14 was both well stated and timely, in view of the accident in Florence, S.C. which followed shortly thereafter. Yet insofar as could be ascertained, the release was not widely utilized by the press and only became of interest at the time of the latest accident.

A briefing to ACBM on the hazards of transportation and use of current weapons brought forcefully to our attention the urgent need to alert the public to such hazards prior to and at the time of any accident involving nuclear weapons. Consideration should be given to having information jointly cleared by Department of Defense and AEC which could be in readiness and utilized immediately in the event of accident. This does not preclude a continuing effort to pursue public education, as suggested in our previous recommendation. It is our belief that the laws of probability work against us in avoiding an accident more major than those which have already arisen. The public, through informed opinion, must share in this responsibility.

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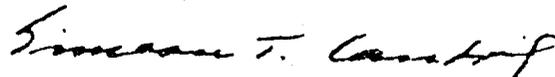
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In the emergency radiation monitoring attending any accident involving the transportation of nuclear weapons, the present policy arrangements between the Department of Defense and the AEC seem somewhat restrictive. We would like to urge that this policy agreement be enlarged to permit full mutual utilization of the emergency capabilities that exist in each agency as well as full mutual utilization of any incident to give experience and knowledge of the problem.

Another matter which we feel worthy of bringing to your attention is the possible desirability of planning for an AEC Radiation Safety Organization permanently based at the Nevada Proving Grounds. The collaboration of USPH has thus far been most helpful, yet with more constant use of NPG associated with projects other than weapons testing, such an organization may be necessary.

And lastly, we were gratified to hear from Dr. Warren of the complete harmony achieved by the UN Radiation Committee in the preparation of its scientific report. In this we appreciate the efforts made by the U.S. members in supplying information and patiently deliberating. We agree with Dr. Warren's view that this UN Committee should be a continuing one.

Respectfully yours,



Simeon T. Cantril, Chairman
Advisory Committee for
Biology and Medicine

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