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November 7, 1955

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HEALTH REGULATIONS IN MINES AND MILLS OF THE
COLORADO PLATEAU

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This memo contains some of the ideas which we exchanged in conversation about a week ago, as well as some additional information which I have since obtained.

As previously indicated, Utah has now adopted health and safety regulations for the uranium mines, using the standards suggested by AEC and agreed to by the USPHS. In Utah the mines are required to do their own checking once a month with instruments purchased by themselves. Colorado has also adopted similar regulations, except that the checking will be done by State mine inspectors. New Mexico, which has 20 underground mines at the present time, will also have State mine inspectors with the difference that their standards are based on a minimum of 500 cubic feet of air per man rather than a maximum permissible level of radon daughters. However, there is a regulation providing for additional ventilation which is enforceable if the inspectors' radon measurements are too high. Those uranium mines on Indian reservations in Arizona are under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Bureau of Mines; the few which are not are regulated by the State in cooperation with the USPHS. Wyoming has only one underground uranium mine (the rest are open pit variety) and is regulated by a law requiring users of isotopes to register with the State Health Department. This includes uranium mines and they are subject to the health department safety rules. South Dakota has four underground mines and is regulated by an industrial hygiene group in the State Department of Health with cooperation from the USPHS. The State of Washington has no pertinent laws and is beginning to produce some ore around Spokane. Consequently, this would be the only State which might be a source of difficulty with regard to health control in the mines.

There are a total of nine uranium mills on the Colorado Plateau. Utah has two mills and another large one under construction. Checks are occasionally made by the State factory inspectors, but not too diligently. The new mill has hired an industrial physician who is

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seeking help from the USPHS in designing the appropriate safety measures. New Mexico has three mills which are carefully controlled by the State; Wyoming and South Dakota each have one. The standards used by the various States in the regulation of the mills are those of the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists who take their figures essentially from the National Committee on Radiation Protection, which are generally accepted. However, the mills are difficult to control, especially with regard to the crushing operations and here the hazard is probably greater with regard to the silica exposure rather than uranium.

Most of this information was obtained from Mr. Duncan A. Holaday, Sanitary Engineer Director, Occupational Health Field Station, Division of Special Health Services, Public Health Service, Salt Lake City, Utah, who is a highly respected authority on the hazards of uranium mining and milling. It is his opinion that the control of the mines will be fairly satisfactory, except in certain places where the ore concentration is high and will consequently be very difficult to achieve sufficient ventilation. It would appear that since the States are now reasonably active in the control of uranium mining and milling hazards, that it would probably be sufficient for the Commission to restrict itself to an advisory role by offering help with special problems.

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DATE ▶	11/4/55					