

Mound Laboratory, Miamisburg, Ohio

January 7, 1959

MOUND LABORATORY-MONSANTO  
Central File No. 49-1-21

*1/7/59*  
CIRCULATION LIMITED

Mr. H. K. Nason

St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Howard:

On Monday, Dick Grove talked to the people at Savannah River about the amount of helium-3 we could expect to get over this year. He learned, that instead of getting more gas than we are now, the supply will go down at the end of March and remain down for the rest of the year at a level of about one-third of what we expected to get. They have two tritium process lines down there, the "F" line and the "H" line. The "F" line has been shut down and the "H" line is not going to operate at capacity. We do not know why this is so because to the best of our knowledge the AEC is operating on a tritium limited basis. It could mean that there is some trouble at Savannah River in production, it could mean a curtailment of weapons schedule, or a deferment of weapons production. In addition, Dick was told that because of this excess capacity Savannah River had been approached by the Commission and asked what they could do about opening bottles and purifying the gas. This is identical with the operation we would carry out in the first part of the recycle facility.

On Tuesday afternoon, we received the attached memo from Don Johnstone. In light of the above, this memo could have significance inasmuch as it could be an oblique approach to cancelling the recycle facility. As you can see from reading it, he is using reactor safeguard committee thinking in that he raises the question of the worst possible case. The question of the escape of tritium is not a new question either here or elsewhere in the Commission. We would put in all the design precautions associated with handling such material including a stack to vent that bit of gas which escapes during process operations. While one cannot deny the possibility that if everything blew to hell the whole business could go up at once as he states, it is not a likely probability.

*[Handwritten signature]*

Item No.

Disposition

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*[Handwritten signature]*



Mr. H. K. Nason

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The tritium would not be in one big lot. There would be a certain distribution, some in process, some in storage and some tied up in finished products, so that the likelihood of it all going at once would be small. We are meeting this morning to study this memo to check the figures and arrive at answers to the questions raised at the end. Question number 2 which asks about the construction of the "disaster-proof" facility makes you wonder since how could you be sure that something is ever completely disaster-proof, e.g, the Titanic which was a so-called unsinkable ship.

An initial reaction to this memo on our part is that unless there is some purpose as above this is a hell of a time to raise the issue in this form. As I said on the phone, these two bits of information, that is, Grove's phone conversation and this memo, may or may not have significance. I will do my best while at Albuquerque to find out what meaning if any is to be attached to the information.

Edward C. McCarthy

McC:glm

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Copy 1 - H. K. Nason

COpy 2 - E. C. McCarthy

