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COMMISSION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
memorandum

DATE:

RG _____

REPLY TO
ATTN OF:

EP-32 Collection 1320

SUBJECT

Meeting ~~BA~~^{BA} DOE/EP Northern Marshalls Survey - Majuro Atoll, December 8-9,
1982

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TO James De Francis, CP-2

Per your instructions, I attended the subject meeting. Ed Patterson had informed me that he had given Roger Ray the responsibility to act as the agency spokesman and to answer questions. I was to be an observer. A copy of annotated notes taken during the meeting and a list of attendees are attached. No representative from the Trust Territory attended the meeting.

The Marshallese/English book prepared for presentation of the survey and the UCRL technical report on the survey results were well received in Majuro. During the formal briefing on the book and in the question and answer sessions that followed, a number of requests were heard for additional information. Other than agreeing to provide available radiological data and to pass along those requests that should be directed to the Department of Defense and to the Government of the Marshall Islands, no new commitments for additional work by DOE were made. The earlier agreement to provide the Northern Marshalls survey results to the populations of the surveyed atolls and islands was reaffirmed. The responses to technical questions by Dr. Bair (health effects and risks), and by Dr. Robison (data collection, analysis, and dose assessment) were very precise and tailored to the audience. Roger Ray was very effective in responding to questions on the purpose and findings of the survey and in keeping the participants on the intended subject.

There was one aspect of the meeting in Majuro that I found very disturbing. This involves agency policy on radiation protection in the Marshalls. The past policy has been to view DOE's responsibilities in the Marshalls as limited in scope and directed primarily toward providing radiological advice and assistance to the Department of the Interior and to the High Commissioners of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, advice that has been thoroughly coordinated within this agency. This advice has emphasized, as a U.S. Government position, application of Federal and International radiation protection standards in decisions on radiation exposure issues in the Marshalls for which the U.S. Government is responsible. This position has been reviewed and accepted in numerous congressional hearings in which DOE has assisted DOI and the Department of Defense in obtaining approval of their radiation protection plans and programs. EPA has informed DOI that U.S. standards do apply to U.S. activities in the Marshalls. In his answers to questions regarding radiation safety and the restrictions that DOI has urged the Marshallese to follow on use of food from certain islands at Rongelap and Enewetak that have highly contamination levels, Roger Ray's statements were not compatible with past policy. Advice was given directly to the Marshallese representatives that changed and, in the perception of some, voided past restrictions. To my knowledge, these changes were not coordinated with anyone in EP, GC, CP, OHER, or with DOI. The Marshallese



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at the meeting appeared surprised, confused, and skeptical of Roger's statements that food from Enjebi Island and from the northern islands at Rongelap could be eaten and that the people should make their own judgments. The representatives at the meeting recognized that this advice was new and inconsistent with recommendations they have been urged to follow for many years. It was stated that they preferred instead advice that was clear and free of qualifications that would require them to make a judgment on whether they should eat the food. Though the Marshallese were polite, and it is not their way to give offense, even so, some of their statements to Roger at this point were obviously sarcastic even when filtered through the interpreter. There was an embarrassing moment when Roger asked the Marshallese to help him explain the advice he had given to them.

Rather than relax current restrictions on use of coconut crabs from the northern islands at Rongelap and on all food from Enjebi Island at Enewetak, the restrictions need to be strengthened. Body burden measurements by BNL during the past year at both atolls have indicated increased levels of Cs-137 in some individuals who have been eating food from restricted locations. The restriction at Rongelap needs to be increased to include all foods from the northern islands. Body burdens for females less than eleven years of age at Rongelap have increased 82% at the time of the last measurement in July 1982. Adult male burdens were up to 56%. Doses are expected to continue to increase to 250 mRem/yr. Relaxing restrictions will cause doses to go even higher. In the past we have considered it vital that DOE's health protection policy in the Marshalls should provide a uniform degree of protection from atoll to atoll and should be consistent with protection provided in the U.S. DOE's standards for the predictive mode for cleanup of Enewetak that were approved by EPA and by Congress, specify 250 mRem/yr (not 500 mRem/yr), and 4,000 mRem/30 yr (not 5,000 mRem/30 yr). I urge that these lower criteria should apply anywhere in the Marshalls where decisions are to be made based on dose predictions. I would be happy to discuss this further if you wish.

On several occasions in after-hour discussions during the trip, Roger and I disagreed on how questions on radiological safety should be handled. This is only a continuation of a difference of opinion between DOE headquarters safety staff and NV staff (at the greatest intensity between Roger and myself) that began many years ago when NV became involved in Enewetak cleanup. This disagreement has intensified as DP and NV have taken steps to take over EP programs and responsibilities in the Marshalls. My view is that this new approach to radiation protection (and I must assume that this is DP's approach) will be difficult for this agency to explain and defend in the future. It may seem curious to others as to why a shift in programmatic responsibilities within DOE causes a shift in radiation protection policy and practice in the Marshalls? I wonder about this myself. I expect that the Bikinians will quickly recognize the implications of this new DOE advice. A logical extension of Roger's advice is that the Bikinians should make their own decision on whether to return to Bikini Atoll. Doses for Bikini Island residents could be 10 times the U.S. standard. Such residents may not meet the standards for radiation workers, and this population includes pregnant women and infants.

My belief is that once Roger's advice is passed along to the Marshallese people and their leaders and legal counsel, DOE's credibility will hit a new low in the Marshalls. At the next opportunity for Marshallese to appear before a congressional hearing or a DOI budget review, they will likely raise this issue if not before that time. DOE will need to develop a coordinated position with DOI and EPA on this new advice. ✓

Tommy McCraw
Office of Operational Safety
Environmental Protection, Safety,
and Emergency Preparedness

2 Attachments

DOE AREA