

December 1, 1999

Ms. Katie Sweeney, Esq.
National Mining Association
1130 17th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036-4677

SUBJECT: U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE REPORT ON LOW-LEVEL
RADIOACTIVE WASTE DISPOSAL

Dear Ms. Sweeney:

I am responding to your letter of November 2, 1999, to Commissioner Greta Dicus of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission regarding a recent U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report, "Low-Level Radioactive Wastes: States Are Not Developing Disposal Facilities." You note that the findings in the report are pertinent to the Commission's consideration of permitting disposal of non-11e.2 byproduct material in uranium mill tailings impoundments. This matter is before the Commission in two staff papers, SECY-99-012, "Use of Uranium Mill Tailings Impoundments for the Disposal of Waste Other Than 11e.(2) Byproduct Material and Reviews of Applications to Process Material Other Than Natural Ores," and SECY-99-011, "Draft Rulemaking Plan: Domestic Licensing of Uranium and Thorium Recovery Facilities - Proposed New 10 CFR Part 41." Both of these papers address issues raised in your White Paper of April 1998.

We share your concern about the development of safe disposal options for radioactive wastes. We have notified staff for all of the Commissioners that the GAO report is relevant to the disposal issues addressed in the above papers and that you have requested that they consider it in their deliberations.

I trust this reply responds to your request.

Sincerely,

[Original signed by]
Thomas H. Essig, Chief
Uranium Recovery and
Low-Level Waste Branch
Division of Waste Management
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards

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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thomas H. Essig".

Thomas H. Essig, Chief
Uranium Recovery and
Low-Level Waste Branch
Division of Waste Management
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
and Safeguards