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Richard Meserve, Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D. C. 20555

Dear Mr. Meserve:

My first reaction when I read that low-level radioactive waste is being recycled into consumer products was one of disbelief. But I kept finding references to it, so I made a point of informing myself through extensive reading. And now that I know it is true, my reaction is one of outrage and horror.

It's bad enough that business interests are pushing for permission to increase radioactive recycling because of the profit involved—regardless of the danger to public health. Even worse is that my government, which already issues licenses to reprocess radioactive metal, is also eager to move forward with and broaden this program because it's a way of disposing of the staggering amount of radioactive material that has accumulated at nuclear weapons facilities and nuclear power stations because there is no safe way of getting rid of it.

The justification given for pursuing this method of disposal is the claim that low-level radioactivity is not harmful—after all, we are exposed to natural background radiation every day. But reputable scientists insist there is no safe level. And this is all the more reason why we should not tolerate exposure to the man-made variety in addition to what already exists in nature.

Your Commission wants to set a federal standard for an “acceptable” level of radioactivity that can be used in a product. Even if there were an acceptable level, the products will not be labeled as having radioactive content. Consumers may be exposed to a dozen different products at one time or to hundreds of products over time. So much for the acceptable-level argument! As with genetically engineered food, we will not know when, and to what extent, we are being exposed.

It goes beyond the grasp of reason that such every-day products as cutlery, pots and pans, toys, baby carriages, swing sets, belt buckles, zippers, furniture, eye glasses, teeth braces, building materials, batteries, automobiles, and computers will have, perhaps already have, radioactivity added to them. But this is what is in store for us if the Department of Energy, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and radioactive metal decommissioning facilities have their way. A standard will be set that allows an increase in the recycling of radioactive scrap.

Mr. Meserve, would you be in favor of this plan if you or members of your family were to be one of the cancer fatalities it will lead to? I implore you to reconsider the NRC position. The government should ban any and all release of recycled radioactive waste

Sincerely,

Hildegarde Hannum