



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

April 9, 1976



B-164052

The Honorable Roert C. Seamans, Jr.
Administrator, Energy Research and
Development Administration

AGC 50066

Dear Dr. Seamans:

In our survey of Federal programs and policies for disposing of
obsolete and unused nuclear facilities, we learned of a situation which
warrants your immediate attention.

AGC 00743

In June 1974 the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) instructed its
field offices to identify, by September 1974, all previously owned,
leased, or other property which could have been contaminated with
radioactivity. This action was directed to those past AEC activities
for which available data was insufficient to insure that residual
radioactivity, if any, does not present a hazard to the environment
and/or public health and safety.

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The field offices identified 49 sites which the Manhattan Engineer-
ing District and AEC had used for various radiological operations. When
operations ceased, AEC released the sites for unrestricted use. Because
of insufficient records, the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) does not know the current use or ownership of some of the
sites. However, some of the sites that were identified included land
now owned by an airport and land in a public park.

ERDA officials explained that operations sponsored by the Manhattan
Engineering District and the early activities of AEC did not provide for
the same care and attention now given to radiological safety and to
related documentation. Consequently ERDA has initiated a program to
study the radiological condition at each site. Under this program,
ERDA plans to use one contractor to make the surveys; thus all 49 sites
will not be surveyed until 1980. ERDA plans to initiate surveys at
three of the sites during fiscal year 1976 at a total cost of about
\$150,000. ERDA officials told us that they were considering repro-
graming funds or requesting a supplemental appropriation to expedite
the program so that all surveys could be completed by fiscal year 1978.

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The expedited program would require \$350,000 a year for fiscal years 1977 and 1978, or a total of \$850,000 for completing the surveys.

ERDA officials told us that the levels of radiation at the 49 sites was not expected to be high. However, they said that, in the absence of adequate documentation and in the light of the less conservative attitudes and less stringent standards that existed in the past, the only way to insure that there were no existing or potential radiation hazards at these sites would be to survey each one.

ERDA's efforts to determine whether the public and environment are sufficiently protected from potential adverse effects are commendable. We believe that, because immediate corrective actions may be needed at one or more of these sites, the surveys needed to make this determination should be completed as quickly as possible. Consequently we recommend that ERDA expedite completing the surveys so that it can either promptly certify that none of the identified sites represents a radiation danger or begin corrective actions where required.

As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the Chairman, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy; the Chairmen of the House and Senate Appropriations and Government Operations Committees; the Chairman of the Health Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare; and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Natural Resources of the House Committee on Government Operations.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation extended to our representatives during this work. We shall appreciate being informed of the action you take on our recommendation.

Sincerely yours,

Henry Eschwege
Director

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