**REVIEW PROCESS:**

**DOE FIELD SITE RECORDS**

**RETAINED UNDER THE MORATORIUM ON THE DESTRUCTION OF HEALTH**

**RELATED RECORDS**

August 2000

## Introduction

This describes the review process used by the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Health Studies to assist in the implementation of DOE-wide moratorium on the destruction of records useful for epidemiological or health studies. The Office of Health Studies' role is to work with DOE records managers at each site and identify and preserve those records that are useful for health studies.

## Background

The laboratories and facilities of DOE and its predecessor agencies engaged in activities related to nuclear weapons production that produced ionizing radiation and/or used toxic chemicals and heavy metals. Understanding the potential health effects associated with exposure to these hazards on current and former plant workers and members of communities located near DOE laboratories or production/clean-up facilities is a major focus of the studies supported by the Office of Health Studies. DOE supports a variety of epidemiological and health studies and public health activities to determine whether the radiation, toxic chemicals, and/or heavy metals affected the health of plant workers and/or members of nearby communities.

## The Moratorium on the Destruction of Health Related Records

To ensure that the appropriate data are available for these health studies, in March 1990 Secretary of Energy James Watkins placed a moratorium on the destruction of DOE and DOE contractor records useful for epidemiological or health studies. The moratorium covered records at all DOE field facilities, laboratories, and offices. The specific records prohibited from destruction were defined in a 1991 memorandum which listed the categories of records which fell under the moratorium. This memorandum listed records categories by existing DOE records disposition schedules and records disposition authorities. This moratorium was reaffirmed by Secretary Bill Richardson in a December 1998 memorandum.

In order to ensure that all records useful for health studies were preserved, the moratorium was applied broadly to DOE and DOE contractor records. Inevitably, some records not useful for

health studies were retained under the moratorium because of the breath of its application to DOE records.

Within a few years, DOE field sites accumulated increasing volumes of records that could not be destroyed because they had to be retained under the moratorium. Local site records managers requested a mechanism for releasing records that were not useful for health studies from preservation under the moratorium. Responsive to this concern, in 1997 the Office of Health Studies devised the process described below for reviewing records retained under the moratorium and for releasing from it those not useful for health research.

Because of the diversity of information that often appears within an individual category of records across the Department, the single most important part of the review process is an on-site examination and evaluation of records by the Office of Health Studies. This allows release of records from the moratorium on a site specific basis.

**Initiating a Review**

A DOE field site initiates the review process. Its records managers notify the Office of Health Studies at DOE headquarters that the site wishes a review of records being retained under the moratorium on the destruction of health-related records. The site can ask that all records being retained under the moratorium be reviewed or only a portion of them.

At this point, the Office of Health Studies' review process is discussed with the site's records managers. For each category of records (as defined by DOE records schedules and disposition authorities) which the site wishes reviewed, a representative sample must be examined by opening and reading the contents of selected records storage boxes.

So that an on-site records inspection can be performed, sites are asked to provide the Office of Health Studies with the following:

1. A list of all records categories (by records disposition schedules and records disposition authorities) which the site wishes reviewed;

2. The span dates of the records in each category, and;

3. The volume of records in inactive storage in each category.

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**Evaluating the Site Records Review List**

Prior to scheduling a site visit, the site records review list is reviewed by epidemiological research staff in the Office of Health Studies. The purpose is to obtain direction from experienced health researchers about which record categories on the site review list might contain information useful for health studies. From this review, specific questions to help identify health-related information

in each category of records are developed. If information useful for epidemiological or health studies is found in the category during the site visit, then the category is determined to be useful for health studies and it continues to remain under the moratorium. If health-related information is not found in the category, the category is deemed not to be useful for health studies and can be released from the moratorium at that site.

For example, some of the categories of records that sites have asked the Office of Health Studies to review include audit files, training records, litigation files, occupational injury and illness files, facility safety correspondence files, and safety reports. The following are examples of the kinds of results such reviews can have.

Where audit files are found to contain information pertaining to environmental or safety audits, they would be deemed to be useful for health research, and they would continue to be preserved under the moratorium. Where such files only contain information pertaining to financial audits, they would be found not to be useful for health research and could be released from retention under the moratorium.

Where training files show that employees took courses in handling hazardous materials and/or radioactive materials and then used the training, they would be determined to be useful for health research and continued to be preserved under the moratorium. If they did not show this, they would be found not useful for health research and could be released from continued retention under the moratorium.

Where litigation files contain information on workers' compensation cases or litigation concerning radiation exposure, exposure to hazardous chemicals, or on the job injuries or illnesses, they would be deemed to be useful for health studies and continued to be preserved under the moratorium. Where they are found not to be useful for health studies, they could be released from continued retention under the moratorium.

By their nature occupational injury and illness files, facility safety correspondence files, and safety reports virtually always contain information useful for health studies. Thus, they are invariably considered useful for health studies, assuming that these categories at the site contained the usual documentation found in such records categories.

**The On-Site Records Inspection**

Next a site review is conducted by Office of Health Studies staff members and the contents of a specific number of boxes from each records category are examined. Notes are taken of box contents and incorporated into a formal site epidemiological records report. The report assesses each category of records and makes formal recommendations as to whether it should, or should not, remain under the moratorium. All records categories which the site asks to be reviewed are addressed in the report, including those which the examination of the site review list had already

indicated are likely not be released from the moratorium. Boxes from categories not likely to be released are inspected to ensure that they contain the usual documentation found in such categories.

For example, for a recent Argonne National Laboratory (ANL) on-site records assessment, information of use for health studies was not found in the audit, training, or litigation files. Therefore, the ANL site epidemiological records report recommended to ANL that these categories be removed from retention under the moratorium and revert to their normal retention periods. The usual information expected was found in the occupational injury and illness files, the facility safety correspondence, and the safety reports. Accordingly, the ANL site epidemiological records report recommended that at ANL these categories remain under the moratorium and continue to be preserved.

If site records managers request it, a close-out meeting is held at which the findings about the usefulness of each records category for health studies are explained. If possible, a draft copy of the site epidemiological records report is left with the site records manager.

**The Site Epidemiological Records Report Approval Process**

Upon return from the site, a final copy of the site epidemiological records report is prepared and submitted to the Chief Operating Officer of the Office of Health Studies and to the Director for Science of the Office of Health Studies. After they approve the report, copies of it are submitted to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), to the National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). Each agency is given approximately 30 days to review the report and to comment on it. If one of these agencies request it, changes are made to recommendations in the report. Once their comments, if any, are incorporated into the site epidemiological records report, it is considered approved.

**Implementation of the Site Epidemiological Records Report Recommendations**

After the site epidemiological records report is approved, a copy is sent to the Director, DOE Headquarters Records Management Division. The Director is asked to have the recommendations implemented. The Director sends the report to the appropriate site records manager and the site can, at this point, follow the report's recommendations in removing categories of records from the moratorium. It must also ensure the continued preservation of records categories kept under the moratorium.