

## **Rocky Flats Citizens Advisory Board Recommendation 97-3**

**to the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

**Regarding a Review of Rocky Flats Soil Action Levels**

**Approved May 1, 1997**

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May 1, 1997

Secretary Federico Peña  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20585

Assistant Secretary Alvin Alm  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20585

Carol M. Browner, Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
410 M Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 21460

Dear Mr. Peña, Mr. Alm, and Ms. Browner:

The members of the Rocky Flats Citizens Advisory Board (RFCAB) are writing to request that the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) contract with the National Academy of Sciences, or other organization that is independent, unbiased and scientifically based, to provide a review of the Soil Action Levels for radioactive materials contamination that were approved by DOE, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and the Environmental Protection Agency as part of the Rocky Flats Cleanup Agreement.

On October 19, 1997, Mr. Alm visited the Denver area and was present for a community meeting concerning Rocky Flats. This visit coincided with the Department's announcement accepting the

controversial Soil Action Levels for use at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site. During the meeting, numerous participants questioned the wisdom of this decision. At that time, Mr. Alm indicated that a review of these levels by the Academy might be appropriate. We are now asking DOE and EPA to initiate this important review by either the Academy or a similar organization.

The need for EPA's cooperation in the funding and development of this study stems from its withdrawal of proposed national radioactive materials in soil contamination standards earlier this year. The Rocky Flats Citizens Advisory Board, in its recommendations on the Soil Action Levels, stressed the need to have national standards in place before setting site-specific standards at Rocky Flats. The Soil Action Levels at Rocky Flats now set a precedent for the rest of the country. We do not feel this is the proper manner in which to set a national standard.

Rationale for contracting with the National Academy of Sciences or other organization includes the following important points:

- The Citizens Advisory Board is not convinced that the conclusions by local DOE, EPA and CDPHE that a plutonium in soil level of 651 pCi/g will produce exposure levels of 85 mrem/year in a residential land use scenario. The Board believes the 651 pCi/g action level set at Rocky Flats is too high in light of the following comparisons:
  - Plutonium in Colorado Soil (Average Background) 0.04 pCi/g
  - 1975 Colorado State Soil Construction Guideline 0.9 pCi/g
  - 1978 Soil Cleanup Standard for Enewetak Atoll 40 pCi/g
- There needs to be more research into the use of the RESRAD model as a tool to predict soil concentration levels that produce exposures at various dose limits such as 15 or 85 mrem. We need to know whether the RESRAD model used to set the Soil Action Levels is accepted by the larger scientific community, not just by DOE scientists who might have a vested interest in the outcome.
- The broader question of what dose level is acceptable also needs to be examined. Given an already higher background exposure from naturally occurring sources and from nuclear fallout, the community downwind from Rocky Flats wants a broader investigation of what millirem level will provide protection from the effects of low level radiation.
- The National Academy of Sciences is a credible, independent scientific organization widely respected by the larger scientific and academic community. By its participation, the Academy will bring a national focus to the issue of setting standards for radioactive materials in soils. DOE and EPA may wish to consider other organizations meeting the same qualifications.

The Citizens Advisory Board realizes that the Department of Energy's budget has been cut significantly

by Congress in recent years. However, we estimate the money paid to the Academy or other organization for this review will save the Department in the long run by avoiding litigation and other expenses trying to defend unacceptable soil cleanup standards. Our community does not accept these standards, nor will others where they might be applied in the future. The Department also will benefit through restored credibility in the Rocky Flats community.

Should DOE and EPA accept our recommendation, it is important that your agencies and the chosen review organization set up a process that allows for active stakeholder involvement in the design and conduct of the study. RFCAB would very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important process.

We thank you for your consideration of this request and look forward to your favorable response.

Sincerely,

Tom Marshall  
Chair

cc:

Jessie Roberson, DOE-RFFO  
Jack McGraw, EPA Region VIII  
Tom Looby, CDPHE  
Governor Roy Romer  
Senator Wayne Allard  
Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell  
Representative Diana DeGette  
Representative Dan Schaefer  
Representative Bob Schaffer  
Representative David Skaggs

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The Rocky Flats Citizens Advisory Board is a community advisory group that reviews and provides recommendations on cleanup plans for Rocky Flats, a former nuclear weapons plant outside of Denver, Colorado.

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