Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

MAR 18 1997

Mr. Bob Slay, Chairman
Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board
P.O. Box 192
Beech Island, South Carolina 29842

Dear Mr. Slay:

Thank you for your letter of January 30, 1997, to Acting Secretary Curtis concerning recommendations 29 and 30 from the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board. Recommendation 29 addresses the treatment of reprocessing in the Department's Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on Savannah River Site Spent Nuclear Fuel Management (61 FR 69085). Recommendation 30 provides comments on the scope of the *Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Certain Plutonium Residues and Scrub Alloy Stored at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site* (61 FR 58866). I have been asked to respond to your letter.

Regarding recommendation 29, we wish to make it clear that reprocessing of domestic spent nuclear fuel will be fully considered as one of the reasonable management alternatives in the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement on management of spent nuclear fuel at the Savannah River Site. The Environmental Impact Statement, however, will describe the Department's preferred alternative for managing domestic spent fuel as considering reprocessing, in the absence of health and safety concerns, only if a new treatment or packaging technology is not ready by the year 2000, and the other conditions specified in the *Record of Decision on a Nuclear Weapons Nonproliferation Policy Concerning Foreign Research Reactor Spent Nuclear Fuel* (61 FR 25092 of May 17, 1996) are met. In other words, the Department's preferred alternative for management of the domestic spent fuel that is similar to the foreign research reactor spent fuel (i.e., uranium-aluminum alloy) would be consistent with its decision on how to manage the foreign research reactor spent fuel.

As to the foreign research reactor spent fuel that was the subject of the May 17, 1996 Record of Decision, the Department has already decided how it will manage foreign research reactor spent fuel until the year 2000 (i.e., the spent fuel will remain in wet storage), and those decisions will be reflected in the "no action" alternative in the Savannah River Site environmental impact statement. Reprocessing of foreign, as well as domestic, research reactor spent fuel after the year 2000 will be among the alternatives analyzed in the Savannah River Site environmental impact statement. At the conclusion of the Savannah River Site environmental impact statement, the Department expects to be in a position to decide how to manage foreign research

reactor spent fuel after the year 2000, as well as how to manage domestic spent fuel both prior to and after the year 2000.

Regarding recommendation 30, the Savannah River Site is being considered for management of some of the Rocky Flats plutonium residues and scrub alloy because the Savannah River Site has facilities that could stabilize and prepare these materials for disposition. The plutonium residues and scrub alloy having the highest likelihood of being sent to the Savannah River Site from Rocky Flats could be processed during stabilization of materials already at the Savannah River Site without delaying planned stabilization, storage and disposition activities, or causing important delays in facility deactivation at the Savannah River Site. The *Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Certain Plutonium Residues and Scrub Alloy Stored at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site* will identify the facilities, equipment and staffing that would be necessary for safe management of any materials that might be sent to the Savannah River Site. The environmental impact statement will also identify the estimated costs of the various alternatives that it analyzes, including activities that might be undertaken at the Savannah River Site. You will have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft environmental impact statement later this year. Any decision based on the environmental impact statement to manage Rocky Flats plutonium residues and scrub alloy at the Savannah River Site would be made only after a careful evaluation of the total budgetary support needed to implement such a decision. The Department would request appropriate funding and would not commit to any course of action for which funding could not reasonably be expected.

The Department's staff in the Savannah River Operations Office is prepared to brief you in more detail on the progress that has been made in stabilizing materials already at the Savannah River Site, and on our plans for and evaluations of future stabilization and spent fuel management activities. We encourage you to contact Dr. Fiori's office (803-725-2277) for any additional details or briefings that you may need.

Sincerely,

Jill E. Lytle
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Nuclear Material and Facility Stabilization
Environmental Management

cc:
M. Fiori, DOE/SR