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June 6, 1996

David Nulton, MD-4
U.S. Department of Energy
Forrestal Building
1000 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Nulton,

At this time I would like to provide additional comments relating to the PEIS on the "Storage and Disposition of Weapons-Usable Fissile Materials".

I have previously expressed strong recommendations to store, and make available to the U.S. Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, *all* weapons-surplus highly-enriched uranium-235 (93%) for eventual utilization as naval reactor fuel; and to create a special reserve supply of lesser enriched uranium fuels (average 50 % enrichment) for use in development of modern sodium-cooled fast reactor systems that certainly will be needed in the U.S. for electrical power generation in the near future, as was recommended by the National Academy of Sciences as their top priority item in their recent evaluation of U.S. national energy development requirments. (Please see my letter to Greg Rudy, MD-1, dated December 22, 1995).

The current international situation relating to weapons development activities by *many* foreign countries, demands that the U.S. maintain its nuclear options in an intelligent and judicious manner. In particular, the apparent reversal of political trends in Russia, and the continuing economic and military buildups in China, Pakistan, Iran, and other potential world trouble-spots, requires that the U.S. *not* unilaterally discard its nuclear options and capabilities. I believe that we should proceed with dismantlement of our surplus old weapon systems, but that we must retain in readily available form, the critical nuclear material recovered from the dismantlement program for possible use for an indefinite period. The cost to accomplish this is practically nothing, since storage of plutonium in metal form for long periods of time is well understood, simple, and quite inexpensive (all facilities and equipment exists), compared to other options being proposed. Attempting to convert plutonium to a permanently-useless form, (short of destruction by fission) is naive, unintelligent, and downright dangerous to future generations. Storing this material for future use, hopefully as fast-reactor fuel, is a wise and prudent investment both for the U.S. economy, and as insurance against undesirable military eventualities.

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I strongly urge the USDOE, and Congress, that the DOE should recover all existing military plutonium in the form of metal castings, sealed under vacuum in welded stainless-steel containers, for long-term storage. This option is absolutely practical for at least 50 years, and probably suitable for hundreds of years more. This option will permit a long-term evaluation of the status of world politics over the next decade and permit a truly realistic evaluation by our own next generation. The Russian state will pursue this approach whether we do or not, and it is in our best national interest to do the same. Any other option at this time, would be gambling with the future of this country and possibly the future of many of the democracies of our current world. 1/08.03.01

Sincerely yours,

Melvin S. Coops, ScD
Retired Nuclear Chemist

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08 03 01 Comment Number 1

The Department of Energy acknowledges the commentor's support for long-term storage of fissile materials. Decisions on storage of weapons-usable fissile materials will be based upon environmental analyses, technical and economic studies, national policy considerations, and public input.