Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

August 18, 1998

Letter to Cask Vendors and Contract Holders:

As you are no doubt aware, the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) has ceased the direct development of specific multi-purpose canister (MPC) designs. However, OCRWM continues to support the multi-purpose canister concept and believes that it is in the nation's interest to encourage the utilization of canisters for at-reactor storage that can subsequently be utilized by the Federal waste management system for transportation, storage and disposal. Such canisters may potentially conserve resources and eliminate unnecessary handling and repackaging of the spent fuel assemblies. The letter that accompanied the recent revised draft Request for Proposals for the acquisition of waste acceptance and transportation services specifically stated that DOE will consider using Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)-approved disposable canisters for the OCRWM program and sharing any attendant cost savings through mechanisms incorporated in the RFP or in possible amendments to the Standard Contract.

While OCRWM recognizes that compliance with regulatory requirements for disposal of a multi-purpose canister will remain uncertain until the NRC issues a license for the monitored geologic repository (MGR), we believe it is in everyone's best interest to provide all parties with the most current information regarding the performance basis for canister disposability and waste package design. This information may aid the designers and users of dual-purpose storage/transport canisters in determining whether to incorporate disposability features into their current designs. Uncertainties in the adequacy of waste package performance requirements and specific waste package designs cannot be fully resolved until the NRC licenses a geologic repository. Therefore, decisions to acquire canisters incorporating specific design features to allow their direct disposal in a geologic repository at this time must consider the uncertainties.

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The Reference Design Description for a Geologic Repository, which is located on the Internet at http://www.ymp.gov/toc/rdd.htm, provides the most current design approach for a repository that could be located at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. In addition, OCRWM is developing preliminary Waste Acceptance Criteria for commercial spent nuclear fuel in disposable multi-element canisters. It is expected that these criteria will be, to the maximum extent practicable, performance based, and would address such things as the limits on size and shape, thermal and material compatibility, performance in the anticipated canister environment, nuclear criticality control, and handling at the MGR facility. As soon as these preliminary Waste Acceptance Criteria are available, we intend to make them available on the OCRWM home page, at http://rw.doe.gov. We anticipate that this will occur later this year.

Additionally, consistent with our approach of relying upon the private sector to solve in a cost-effective fashion the numerous technical challenges associated with the design and licensing of a multi-purpose canister, we are removing the previously issued "Multi-Purpose Canister Subsystem Design Procurement Specification" from the technical baseline.

We remain committed to working with the private sector to ensure that the MPC concepts are included in commercial spent fuel storage and transportation systems at the earliest appropriate time in a cost-effective fashion. OCRWM has committed the resources of the Office of Acceptance, Transportation, and Integration to serve as the focal point between the nuclear industry and the MGR in this effort. Should you have any questions or comments on this effort, or on any of the specific information contained in the referenced documents, I encourage you to contact Mr. Markus Popa, Waste Acceptance and Transportation Division, at 202-586-5330.

Sincerely,

Dwight Shelor, Acting Director
Office of Acceptance, Transportation,
and Integration
Office of Civilian Radioactive
Waste Management