DOE NEWS

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Secretary Richardson Suspends Release of Materials from DOE Facilities

Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson today suspended the release of potentially contaminated scrap metals for recycling from Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear facilities. The suspension is part of a new policy aimed at ensuring contaminated materials are not recycled into consumer products and at improving the department's management of scrap materials at its nuclear weapons production sites.

"I am making this decision to ensure American consumers that scrap metal released from Energy Department facilities for recycling contains no detectable contamination from departmental activities," said Secretary Richardson. "The suspension will remain in effect until our sites can confirm that they meet this new more rigorous standard."

DOE's existing standards result in radiation exposure that is already far below what is allowed by federal policy. Detection equipment currently available will enable the department to do even better.

The department also is initiating a feasibility study on the possibility of recycling steel from decommissioned facilities into waste containers or other items needed by DOE. A preliminary review completed last May concluded that the concept merits a more detailed study.

"I am challenging the department's managers to think creatively and come up with incentives to promote internal reuse and recycling," said Secretary Richardson.

Richardson also announced other steps to improve record keeping and reporting as well as acceleration of the department's program to collect some types of commercially owned, radioactive sources that are no longer in use. Sealed radioactive sources are used in a variety of measurement, calibration and other activities. These sources can pose significant risks to steelworkers or the public if abandoned or illegally disposed. DOE has responsibility under the Low-Level Waste Policy Act of 1985 to dispose of them properly.

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