

MH-S 3

December 27, 1974

SECY - 75-449

INFORMATION REPORT

SUMMARY SHEET

Subject: STATUS OF ENEWETAK CLEANUP

Purpose: To inform the Commission.

Discussion: Enclosed for the information of the Commission is a copy of a report of a visit by the AEC, the Defense Nuclear Agency (DNA), and the Department of the Defense (DOI) staff to Enewetak and Bikini Atolls during the week of September 2, 1974. On August 2, 1974, the Commission approved SECY 75-81 containing the recommended radiological criteria for Enewetak Atoll. The criteria were transmitted to DNA and DOI. During the week of September 2, 1974, representatives of AEC, DNA, and DOI, the District Administrator of the Marshall Islands, and the Enewetak Council met at Enewetak and discussed the recommendations; however, there were a number of questions about the criteria which the staff answered. On pages 3 and 4 of the report, there is a discussion of some of the follow-on work that was identified during the trip. These are currently being considered by the staff. The timetable for the Enewetak cleanup has been delayed because the Congress did not provide DNA with the necessary funding.

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SUMMARY RESULTS OF ENEWETAK/BIKINI ATOLL
VISITS

September 1974

DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PEOPLE

On August 12, 1974, the Commission considered and approved recommendations contained in SECY 75-81 for cleanup and rehabilitation of Enewetak Atoll and instructed the staff to obtain comments from the Enewetak people. During the week of September 2, 1974, staff of the Defense Nuclear Agency (DNA), Department of the Interior (DOI), and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), met with the Enewetak people and their advisors at Enewetak Atoll.

The AEC recommendations were presented to the Enewetak Council, their advisors, members of the Congress of Micronesia, and staff of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The DNA submitted a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which contains the AEC recommendations as the preferred option. During the series of meetings, there was ample opportunity for questions.

Additional information was presented on radiation standards and their application to the radiological conditions leading to the recommendation that Enjebi not be resettled at this time. AEC staff were asked when Engebi would become habitable again. The staff responded that a precise estimate was not possible now, that natural decay would reduce the radioactivity in the soil and plants to acceptable levels in 30 years, and that AEC would be studying the rate of reduction of radioactivity in the environment and within five years should have a better answer to the question.

There was a question about how the Enjebi people were to be accommodated till they can return to their island. A DOI representative said that this should be worked out by the Enewetak people and that it was hoped an agreement would be reached permitting the Enjebi people to live in the southern islands. The Enjebi people are concerned that their houses may be constructed on southern islands they do not own and that the houses could not later be moved to Enjebi.

Representatives of AEC, DNA, and DOI, the District Administrator of the Marshall Islands, and the Enewetak Council and their legal advisors discussed the announced plan for 50 people to return to Japtan Island prior to cleanup. On July 18, 1974, DOI was advised that while there was no contamination on Japtan Island, AEC does not recommend return of people before cleanup and certification because of a number of hazardous conditions known to exist in other

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parts of the Atoll. However, AEC would interpose no objections to such return provided TTPI can assure effective measures to restrict access to unsafe areas and prevent removal or transport of contaminated scrap. Interior did proceed to approve and announce the early return. A list of conditions and restrictions for this return were prepared. These included: (1) no visits to islands in the north, (2) scrap collection only with permission of the TTPI Representative, (3) visits to other islands in the south under control of the TTPI Representative. The Japtan conditions and restrictions were presented to the Council. See Attachment I.

During a side trip to Bikini, legal advisors to the Bikini Council requested a comparison of the predicted radiation doses for the Bikini people and the predicted dose for the Enewetak people. The radiological survey findings and decision to rehabilitate Bikini Atoll were reviewed. (See Attachment II, Liverman to Barry, June 27, 1974.) The advisors were told that the same radiation standards were used for both Enewetak and Bikini Atolls. Food items such as pandanus, breadfruit, banana and papaya, will be monitored for uptake of radioactivity and contribution to radiation dose. Locally grown pandanus and breadfruit will not be available for four or five years. Banana and papaya will be available much earlier.

FOLLOWUP ACTIONS AND FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

The agreed upon division of responsibilities between the several Federal agencies for Enewetak Atoll assigns the Department of Defense, with DNA as its action agency, the job of preparing the DEIS and conducting and funding the cleanup. DOI is to be responsible for rehabilitation, including commercial and subsistence agriculture and housing and community facilities construction. The AEC conducted the radiological survey and provided radiological criteria and recommendations for cleanup. In addition, AEC is to provide advice and close liaison with DNA and DOI on radiological aspects of cleanup and rehabilitation field operations. AEC will participate in certification that cleanup, according to the criteria and recommendations, has been satisfactorily completed. Further, there is a firm requirement for followup of the environment and people to be certain that radiation dose predictions are indeed correct. These are responsibilities AEC will have to assume. This same division of responsibilities and participation applied to Bikini Atoll cleanup and rehabilitation. Except for certification and environmental studies, AEC is thus in an advisory role for both atolls.

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The following areas will require further study:

1. A study is needed to answer questions regarding resettlement of Enjebi. How fast are the radioactivity levels in the environment being reduced? What are the important contributors to this reduction? Are there feasible remedial measures? What are the actual radioactivity contents for locally produced foods?

Answers are needed within five years for Enewetak Atoll. The information also will be applicable to Bikini Atoll in verifying the long-term radiation dose predictions.

2. Criteria have been provided to DNA for cleanup of plutonium. Additional guidance is required on feasibility of reducing the quantity of material requiring disposal, e.g., can plutonium be removed from the contaminated soil, and what is the cost of such action? This information will have an impact on the method chosen for disposal of contaminated material and therefore on the cost of cleanup.

Answers are needed so that DNA can effectively deal with plutonium cleanup and disposal during the cleanup of other debris, expected to require two to three years of field work. Otherwise, AEC may well inherit a long-term problem.

3. Not all islands at Bikini Atoll were returned free of restrictions and several important food items were not growing and could not be sampled. New foods never before grown in the Atoll have been planted. A long-term followup of the radiological status of the environment and people of Bikini Atoll is being done. It is essential to insure that doses to the people remain within the standards. It is necessary to determine when restrictions may be removed for certain islands.

Current environmental monitoring data will be needed to answer questions and allay fears at both Bikini and Enewetak. This is a long-term effort with results needed today.

4. There is a need for current data on external radiation levels on Bikini Island to bring information up to par with Enewetak Atoll. Also, questions are being asked about the current radiological status of other atolls that received significant fallout from the 1954 Bravo test. External radiation surveys using the aerial survey system and surveys of food items are needed for Rongelap, Rongerik, Ailinginae, and Utirik Atolls. There is an increasing number of inquiries about the radiation levels in these Atolls, and little or no current radiation data.

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5. The problem of disposal of contaminated scrap and soil requires additional study. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) staff have indicated an application for a permit for disposal of contaminated debris in the ocean must contain a comprehensive evaluation of the various disposal alternatives and their costs. EPA has indicated such an application may take a year or more to process.

Results of an evaluation of disposal alternatives will be needed in about one year to allow time for EPA processing and in order to obtain a permit for ocean disposal for timely use during and near the finish of cleanup field operations.

The five items above require decisions regarding responsibility and funding within AEC and its divisions and field offices. A clear understanding of division of responsibilities between AEC and DOD is also needed. There is a critical need for answers to the questions that have been raised in items 1, 2 & 5 and the research and necessary studies must be accomplished quickly. The followup environmental monitoring and re-evaluation of the dose predictions represent longer term studies that will be continued indefinitely. Annual funding for this work will have to be continued and increased when both Bikini and Enewetak Atolls are resettled.

It should be noted that AEC will have to provide qualified representatives to give technical advice on cleanup to DNA and its contractors and to provide current and timely guidance in the field during cleanup and rehabilitation. Cleanup is expected to last two to three years. Rehabilitation is estimated to require about two years. The precise mechanism for providing this support has not been developed. However, it is expected that AEC and selected contractor staff will be designated to provide technical advice in the field under the cognizance of the Division of Operational Safety. Funding will be needed for contractor staff participation and for travel over a five-year period starting with DNA field operations.

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