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Groups Urge Stockpiling of Nuclear Medicine

Ask President Not to “Flip-Flop” On Bioterrorism

(9-26-2007) Today, national, state and local public interest groups sent a letter to the White House urging implementation of the Bioterrorism Act’s Section 127 – mandating stockpiling of potassium iodide (KI) within 20 miles of nuclear reactor sites.

Mary Lampert, of Pilgrim Watch in Duxbury, Massachusetts said, “We deeply regret that President Bush has moved to try to nullify Section 127 of the 2002 Bioterrorism Act law that would have improved protection for the public in case of a nuclear accident caused either by terrorism, mechanical failure or simply human error.”

The groups have asked President Bush to be true to his word and stockpile KI beyond a 10-mile radius. Congress recognized the importance of this initiative, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) studies acknowledged the value of the medicine, which if taken immediately upon exposure to radioactive iodine can block the thyroid’s absorption of the cancer-causing toxin.

Rochelle Becker, Executive Director of the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility based in San Luis Obispo California stated, “This is yet another cost of using nuclear power for energy generation. No other energy source requires medication to protect local residents in the event of an accident. ”

In a letter to Dr. John Marburger, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the groups asked Dr. Marburger to persuade President George W. Bush not to “flip-flop” and, “stick to his initial decision supporting distribution out to 20 miles.” The groups want Mr. Bush to follow the mandate of Congress and the advice of America’s top scientists and medical professionals.

(Copies of the attached letter were also sent to the Senate/House Committees on Homeland Security)

Lisa Rainwater, Policy Director for Riverkeeper, Inc., based in New York commented, "The President may talk about no child left behind in education; but when it comes to a nuclear accident, the Administration's latest plan would leave most children behind without providing them the protection that is readily available to prevent thyroid cancer and disease."

The American Thyroid Association supports Potassium Iodide distribution for radiation emergencies, recommending that KI be part of an emergency plan that includes evacuation and sheltering-in-place. Potassium Iodide is most effective in infants, children up to eighteen years old, and pregnant women.

Eric Epstein, Chairman of Three Mile Island-Alert Inc. based in Harrisburg, Pa. noted, "Having this medicine in place helps protect all kids who may find themselves in harm's way. There is no excuse not to take this common sense, public health step." Epstein recently filed a Petition for Rulemaking with the NRC asking to extend host school pick-up centers for school children from five to 10 miles beyond the radiation plume exposure boundary zone.

Lampert concluded, "The Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the nuclear power industry fought the legislation; however it passed almost unanimously and was signed into law by the president. The White House hailed the result, declaring that henceforth, this "crucial" drug would be available where needed in an emergency. The public has been waiting years for the President to abide by the Law. It is high time he act to protect the public."

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