



STATE OF ARKANSAS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
State Capitol
Little Rock 72201

66110 1990
Bill Clinton
Governor

October 8, 1990

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr.
1500 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Dear Bud:

The Vertac Chemical Corporation plant in Jacksonville, Arkansas, was first identified as a potential source of TCDD during the National Dioxin Survey conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1978. After TCDD was found in waste at the plant, EPA and the state of Arkansas began to investigate the extent of the contamination and found that solid wastes containing TCDD had been buried on the Vertac site, and liquid wastes had been discharged into the city's wastewater treatment system. Surface runoff, leakage from the buried waste, and sewage have carried contaminants off the plant site as well. As a result, TCDD has been found in sediments of two streams flowing out of Jacksonville, and two landfills are contaminated as well.

In 1979, the state filed suit against Vertac to stop the pollution. In 1980, we joined with EPA in a similar action and forced Vertac and a second company, Hercules, Inc., to contain the pollution. The Vertac plant was added to the Superfund list in 1982. After 1982, it took EPA and the state five additional years to determine full legal responsibility, to develop funding, and to study all remedy alternatives for the actual cleanup.

To maintain a role in the cleanup of the Vertac site, the state decided to assume cleanup responsibility for the processed wastes stored above ground on the Vertac site which included approximately 28,000 drums of pesticide wastes. About 2700 of these drums have an average of 40 ppm of TCDD. All drums at this time are stacked on concrete pads under metal sheds. As you can imagine, these drummed wastes are vulnerable to potential catastrophic events such as severe storms or tornados.

Due to the quantity, variety, and toxicity of the drummed wastes, both EPA and the state concluded it was too hazardous to transport the 28,000+ barrels of waste to another site for treatment. To expose additional communities and their residents to dioxin wastes was an unacceptable risk we did not want to take.

With assistance and advice from EPA, the state examined several technologies for the disposal of the drummed wastes. Incineration was chosen as the only proven/demonstrated method to destroy the variety and quantity of drummed wastes at Vertac. EPA does not consider on-site storage as a solution, and the agency has placed a land ban on all dioxin wastes. Other technologies simply are not in existence.

The state reviewed at least nine incineration proposals. Finally, after almost two years, the state selected MRK Incineration, and a contract was signed with the company in July 1989. MRK Incineration is a new company, and Vertac is its first incineration project. MRK, though, has a staff with considerable experience in incineration to provide the technical working knowledge the state and EPA felt was needed to complete the project safely.

EPA has established a 99.9999 percent destruction removal efficiency (DRE) for the incineration of dioxin. The 99.9999 DRE is designed to meet a one in a million health risk standard for cancer, as established by the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry and the Centers for Disease Control.

My office contacted the National Center for Toxicological Research in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to determine if the 99.9999 percent DRE for dioxin was achievable. We were told that in a properly operated incinerator, a 99.9999 percent DRE can be achieved and has been achieved in test burns of dioxin and in actual cleanups in Mississippi and Missouri where dioxin wastes were incinerated. We also contacted nationally known toxicologists to determine if one in a million health risk standard for dioxin was protective of human health. We were told it was.

Although a number of health problems have been alleged by the citizens in Jacksonville, we have found no evidence supporting those claims. I have had state and federal agencies examine the health issue closely; and all of the health indicators (fetal loss rates, birth defects, neonatal deaths, cancer rates, school absentee levels, etc.) show no significant differences in the health of Jacksonville residents compared to the health of citizens in the rest of the state. Jacksonville doctors also have not identified patterns that suggest severe and unusual health problems, and they have stated as much.

In 1987, I asked for a chemical exposure study of Conway and Jacksonville by the Centers for Disease Control to determine whether the health of Jacksonville's residents was at risk. The chemical exposure levels were not significantly different in the two communities.

However, I have no reason to disbelieve those people who have concerns that their health has been impaired by Vertac. The variety of chemicals produced at the Vertac plant and the years of exposure could very well have caused severe health problems. Further, the effects of dioxin in humans are still not understood very well.

New health studies are being developed at this time by the state Department of Health and ATSDR. Blood samples will be taken before and after incineration to determine the level of exposure from dioxin, if any, due to incineration. Further, a health survey of Jacksonville also is being developed, and interviews are now in progress.

The state has proceeded with deliberation and careful consideration through this entire 11-year ordeal. Scientists and health experts have assured us that incineration, when performed correctly and according to state and federal health and safety standards, will destroy the wastes and will protect public health. I believe our actions have been environmentally responsible. I honestly could not sleep another night if I felt the health of our people was at an unwarranted level of risk.

The entire cleanup, however, depends upon successful test burns of a variety of materials, including chemicals more difficult to incinerate than dioxin but not as hazardous. Unless those test burns achieve the 99.9999 percent DRE and unless the incinerator is able to sustain a successful burn for several weeks during the trial burn phase, incineration of wastes with dioxin will not take place.

I have tried to be responsive and open to criticism about this project and have listened to every concern. It might have been easier for me politically to stop our role in this project, but EPA simply would have proceeded with incineration.

Thanks for your interest in this matter. I enjoyed our talk.

Sincerely,



Bill Clinton

BC:ks:md