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Followup to Telephone Conversation Between DOE and Iowa Governor's Office regarding Concerns about IAAAP Assessment and Remediation Activities (Unsigned)

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June 7, 2002

Mr. Kyle McSlarrow
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Dear Mr. McSlarrow:

This letter shall serve as a follow up to our earlier telephone conversation regarding the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant in Middletown, Iowa (IAAP). As you recall, Governor Vilsack contacted your office to discuss his concerns about assessment and remediation activities at IAAP. You asked me to provide you with a brief outline describing the relevant issues prior to Secretary Abraham's telephone conversation with Governor Vilsack. I will attempt to provide you with a brief outline below.

In 1947, the Atomic Energy Commission contracted with a company named Silas-Mason to operate the munitions plant at IAAP. The public has understood that from 1946 to approximately 1973, IAAP manufactured depleted uranium shell casings, timing mechanisms for nuclear weaponry, and conventional arms of various types.

In 1973, the United States Army assumed control of IAAP (we are unclear when ownership of IAAP was transferred from the Atomic Energy Commission to the Army). Today, American Ordnance, a corporate descendent of Silas-Mason, operates IAAP and produces in the conventional munitions on the Army site. The Army also rents 7,700 acres of the site to area farmers for crop production. The Iowa National Guard conducts training exercises on 1,000 acres of the site, and the Army permits area hunters and fishing enthusiasts to access IAAP property for sport as well.

In 1990, the United States Environmental Protection Agency placed the site on the National Priorities List, making the site eligible for funding under CERCLA. Cleanup activities for non-radioactive contamination have been on-going.

On January 6, 2000, the Department of Energy agreed to perform a radiological survey of Line 1 and Fire Site 12 at IAAP, in response to public concerns about potential radioactive contamination. The department completed the survey in June, 2000, and found residual radioactive contamination to be present in some areas.

In November, 2000, the Iowa Department of Public Health received a set of declassified materials from the Department of Energy, pursuant to the historical assessment of IAAP being conducted by the Army and EPA. The materials contained the following items:

April 10, 1970: An outgoing telecommunication message makes reference to a Pu incident, Foreknowledge of environmental contamination, and releases of p1.

October 20, 1970: A letter entitled "Soil Sampling for Plutonium Analysis" transmits a procedure for sampling soil, and specifically references the sampling of soil around 'plutonium processing plants.'

May 15, 1972: A report entitled "Natural and Depleted Uranium (D-38) Concentration in the IAAP Area" contains the statement, "the only samples which exceeded the most restrictive regulation...were the samples obtained in the tunnel at FS-12 and approximately 100 yards from ground zero."

November 8, 1973: A telephone conversation record entitled "criticality" referred to a 'TWX from ALO on criticality that he [Earl] stopped earlier in the week.'

November 11, 1973: A Telex from Albuquerque, New Mexico to various recipients, including Silas Mason, emphasizes the need to promptly report "incidents which could have health and safety or public relations implications, particularly when radioactive materials are involved." The Telex goes on to say that "there have been two recent events which were not reported immediately, presumably because they were judged of little or no consequence."

April 8, 1975: A final report on radioactive waste 'transferred to Pantex' notes the transfer of .031 Ci of Cobalt-60, .008 Ci of Cesium-137, and 4.0 Ci of Plutonium-239.

December 27, 1979: An installation environmental impact statement at IAAP contains the statement, "waste explosives and contaminated explosive wastes are disposed of by open burning."

On March 2, 2001, the Iowa Department of Public Health sent a letter to the Lieutenant Colonel at IAAP with a set of questions designed to clarify the above-mentioned references in Department of Energy materials. On March 7, 2001, the Lieutenant Colonel responded to the Department of Public Health letter by stating that the questions asked could not be answered by the Army since they addressed Atomic Energy Commission operations. The Lieutenant Colonel forwarded the letter to the Department of Energy for a response.

On April 19, 2001, Governor Vilsack sent a letter to Secretary Abraham expressing his concerns that newly-declassified documents raise questions about whether the scope of activities at IAAP were broader than previously acknowledged. Secretary Abraham responded in a later dated June 19, 2001. The letter made no mention of the questions raised by the Iowa Department of Public Health concerning the newly-declassified documents received by the Department of Energy. Rather the letter expressed support for efforts to ensure safety at the site, and support for the Department of the Army in all of its review and search activities for radiological contamination at IAAP.

Governor Vilsack wishes to describe the basis for this state's present concern about potentially undetected radioactive contamination at IAAP with Secretary Abraham. Governor Vilsack also wishes to discuss potential strategies for ensuring that all radioactive contamination at IAAP is identified, assessed, and remediated in an efficient and thorough manner.

Thank you Mr. McSlarrow for your attention to this matter. Please contact me in advance of the Secretary's telephone call if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

N. Brian Gentry
General Counsel