

Mr. Richard D. Copaken
Covington & Burling
888 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Mr. Copaken:

Please excuse the delay in replying to your letter of April 25, 1980, as I have only recently returned to the office after a prolonged illness.

During the meeting of April 23, 1980, I questioned your statement that the "... atolls of the northern Marshall Islands had been viewed by the United States as ... uncontaminated by radioactive fallout from the nuclear weapons testing ...," and I stated that I was not aware that the Department of Energy had ever made that statement. This does not seem to be quite the same statement that you attribute to me in your letter, i.e., "... that the Department of Energy has always recognized the fact that every atoll in the Marshall Islands was exposed to radiation from the ... testing program."

Further, reference to my statement (above) outside of the context in which it was discussed is misleading. You also may recall that the reference statement was the first of several statements I made which clarified that fallout from the U.S. (and other nations') nuclear weapons testing programs could be discerned not only in the islands of the northern Marshall Islands, but also in other areas of the North Pacific basin, the North American mainland, Europe and other continental land masses, and in much of the oceans and ocean sediments around the world.

Although specific analysis will have to await the detailed results of the radiological survey of the northern Marshall Islands, with the exception of the atolls of Rongelap, Utirik, Ailinginae, Rongerik, Bikini and Enewetak, at present the fission product contamination levels in the northern Marshall Islands appear to be near or below similar fallout contamination levels on the mainland of the United States. This statement is based upon very preliminary data from monitoring the external radiation levels in the northern Marshall Islands as a part of the survey, and upon a limited amount of published results of soils analyses carried out over the past several years. These radiation levels are related to certain long-lived radionuclides from the nuclear tests that reside in island surface soils; these same radionuclides are also found on the U.S. mainland.

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OFFICIAL TO CLAIM THAT THE NORTHERN MARSHALL ISLANDS WERE ... CONTAMINATED BY RADIOACTIVE FALLOUT FROM THE U.S. NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING... program, as you categorically stated in your letter of April 21, 1980, to Mr. Wallace Green.

I trust that this will clarify the record that a) I am not aware of any such claim being advocated, and b) that with the exception of the six aforementioned atolls there is at present no reason to believe that current radiation contamination levels in the northern Marshall Islands differ very much from contamination levels in other land areas of the world, such as the U.S. mainland, although verification of this latter point will have to await the final results of the Northern Marshall Islands Radiological Survey.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.

Sincerely,

Bruce W. Wachholz

Bruce W. Wachholz, Ph.D.
Office of Health and
Environmental Research
Office of Environment

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