

COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP
1637 BUTLER AVENUE, SUITE 203
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90025
(310) 478-0829

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
13 July 2000

CONTACT: Daniel Hirsch
(831)462-6136

DOE Suspends Release of Radioactively Contaminated Metals from Nuclear Sites,
Pledges to Bar Recycling into Consumer Goods

Watchdog Group Cautiously Praises Move, Urges "No Loopholes"

U.S. Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson today announced he is suspending the release of contaminated scrap metals for recycling from Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear facilities. The suspension will remain in effect until a new policy is put in place barring the release of metals for recycling into consumer products if they have any detectable radioactive contamination from DOE activities. Current DOE practice has permitted such radioactive recycling, creating widespread controversy.

"DOE's announcement today is a tremendous victory for all those who have fought to prevent radioactive waste from ending up in consumer goods such as spoons, frying pans, jewelry, zippers and automobiles," said Daniel Hirsch, President of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, a nuclear watchdog group that has opposed the release of radioactively contaminated materials. "The key issue, however, will be the fine print - is the ban broad enough to stop release of all radioactively contaminated materials, or limited just to metals, and just to recycling?"

Bridge the Gap recently disclosed that DOE's Santa Susana Field Laboratory, a nuclear facility in the hills above Simi Valley, California, had been releasing radioactively contaminated metals and other materials for recycling, contaminated equipment for resale and reuse, and contaminated soils and building debris for shipment to municipal and other landfills not licensed to take radioactive materials. It is not clear whether all of these practices will be barred by today's action by DOE Secretary Richardson, or just the metal recycling. Additionally, the ban only applies to DOE facilities, not commercial nuclear plants under Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) authority. The NRC has proposed a rulemaking to permit extensive release of contaminated materials from NRC-licensed civil nuclear facilities.

"We will work with DOE to clarify this ban, assuring that it prevents not just recycling of radioactive metals, but release, for any purpose, of all materials *with* detectable contamination," said Hirsch. "And we call on the NRC to likewise abandon its plans to permit widespread release of contaminated materials from its nuclear facilities."

"DOE is to be commended for taking this step. Members of the public should not have to worry every time they put a spoon to their mouth, see their children sucking on a toy, or when they get into their car that they are exposing themselves and their loved ones to radiation from recycled parts of nuclear reactors," Hirsch stated.

#