

July 21, 2004

The Honorable Mike Leavitt  
Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Leavitt:

I write to request your support in including health physics under the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) existing university grants programs for environmental research. Health physicists are radiation safety professionals trained to protect the environment, public, and workers as radiation and nuclear technologies are used to support our nation's energy, health, and security needs. I am concerned about a looming shortage of experts in this vital profession that will put the quality of our environment, the health of the American people, and the safety of our workers in jeopardy.

The national shortage of radiation safety experts is due, in part, to inadequate funding for undergraduate and graduate scholarships and fellowships, along with an aging workforce. Current projections are that 76 percent of the nation's professional nuclear workforce could retire in five years. The health physics program at Idaho State University, for example, one of the largest in the nation, has seen a direct correlation between declining enrollment and the cessation of federal funding since the mid-1990s. In the past several years, long-standing health physics programs at the University of North Carolina and the University of Michigan's School of Public Health have been abolished.

Historically, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Public Health Service, and more recently, the Department of Energy (DOE) have provided federal support for health physics academic programs. DOE terminated the Applied Health Physics Fellowship and Research grant approximately five years ago. I have been working with my colleagues in the Congress to encourage and enable the DOE Office of Nuclear Science, Engineering and Technology to begin providing support for health physics academic programs, but the DOE funding will be limited to energy-related programs. This does not address the need for these experts to support other important areas – such as the environment, public health, and national security.

EPA's responsibility to establish federal radiation protection guidance for federal agencies underscores the importance of the agency's role in health physics. I urge the

EPA to assume a leadership position in ensuring the education of future generations of nuclear health physicists. The potentially critical loss can be averted by including health physics programs under appropriate grants programs administered by your department. Your support will enhance EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Mike Crapo  
United States Senator