

May 13, 1981

F/SWC2:GHB

TO: Bill Gilmartin

FROM: George H. Balazs

SUBJECT: Ocean dumping of radioactive waste materials in the vicinity of the
Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

This subject has recently come to my attention through an EPA report prepared in November 1980 for the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, U.S. House of Representatives. The available information shows that during 1959-60 seven containers were dumped by the Military Sea Transport Service at 34°58'N, 174°52'W, approximately 300 miles north of Pearl and Hermes Reef. The report states that the depth of disposal was 5,490 m. The wastes are listed as "by-product materials" with an activity of 14 Ci at the time of packaging. The specific isotopic content is not stated, although such data may exist somewhere in military records. "By-product materials" are defined in the report as wastes that contain isotopes such as cobalt-60, strontium-90, iron-55, tritium, and cesium-137. The report further states that waste materials were generally either packaged in special containers which were then placed in concrete-filled steel drums, or mixed directly in concrete which were in turn placed in the steel drums. At a 900- to 1,700-m dump site in the Farallon Islands off California, approximately 25% of these drums were found to have imploded.

The agency and location where the waste material originated are not listed in the report. The proximity of Midway to the dumping area suggests this site as a possible origin.

bc: Balazs
HL

GHB:iht