

Media and Political Implications
on Radiation Policy in the United States

Lynne A. Fairbent
Scientific Advisor to
Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety and Health
U.S. Department of Energy

It was becoming more and more difficult to set regulations based solely on scientific facts in the United States. Recently, the influence of the media and political processes has resulted in efforts to establish prescriptive legislation without regard to science. One such example is the issue of "below regulatory concern" (BRC). In the U.S., BRC is used to define a level of radioactivity that need to be regulated simply because the material is radioactive. The regulatory and technical issues of BRC are not at issue although there is debate within the U.S. scientific community on a single numerical value to be applied in all circumstances. However, the public and political issues related to BRC are perhaps the most difficult ones to address.

This paper reviews the difficulty in conveying to the non-scientific community the rationale for "de-regulating" radioactive material through a review of the BRC process.