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MAJORITY-225-3961

MINORITY-228-8908

October 16, 1990

Mr. J. Michael J. Quinlan
Director
Federal Bureau of Prisons
320 First Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20534

Dear Mr. Quinlan:

The Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, and the Administration of Justice has received numerous allegations that the water at the Marion Federal Penitentiary is contaminated with toxic substances. As you will recall, one of the purposes of my visit to the Penitentiary in May, 1990 was to investigate complaints about the water supply. The Illinois State Environmental Protection Agency conducted a test of the water during our visit and the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) analyzed the results for us. I am writing to you at this time to share the results of this study and to ask that you take immediate steps to address the serious public health risks identified by ATSDR.

The Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry assessed the quality of the potable water at the Marion Penitentiary, concluding that it "does not contain PCBs, furans, dioxins, pentachlorophenol, lead, or iron at levels of public health concern." While manganese is not present in levels that would create a public health hazard, it could result in objectionable conditions, including unpleasant taste and discoloration. However, most importantly, total trihalomethanes have been detected at levels as high as two times the Environmental Protection Agency's maximum contamination level. ATSDR recommends that the Bureau of Prisons take appropriate steps to address this public health concern.

It is my understanding that Trihalomethanes, present in the water as a byproduct of the chlorination process, can result in an increased risk of cancer. As ATSDR points out, EPA regulations require that the consumers of water be notified if maximum contamination levels are exceeded. In addition, ATSDR recommends that the Bureau of Prisons take steps to reduce the production of trihalomethanes in the water treatment system.

Mr. J. Michael Quinlan
October 15, 1990
Page Two

In addition to immediate notification to the correctional employees and the inmate population of the water contamination, I would urge you to make an alternative water supply available to Marion prison residents while you correct the treatment process or develop a new water source. Please inform me of the immediate steps that you take to assure that the water supplied at the Marion Penitentiary is safe.

With warm regards,

Sincerely,



ROBERT W. KASTENMEIER
Chairman
Subcommittee on Courts,
Intellectual Property, and the
Administration of Justice

Enclosure