

Dear President Obama:

In 2002, Congress passed The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness Act of 2002, PL-107-188, Title I § 127 (the Act). Among other things, the bill directed the federal government to stockpile and distribute enough potassium iodide (KI) to protect all Americans in case of a nuclear emergency. KI is well-recognized as a critical component of any preparedness plan.

The legislation also directed the National Academy of Sciences to determine “what is the most effective and safe way to distribute and administer potassium iodide tablets on a mass scale.” The Academy issued its report two years later, finding that the radius of 20 miles required by the Act was too restricted in light of the Chernobyl experience which found that winds after that accident carried the radioactive plume over 150 miles. The Academy’s recommendation was direct: there should be enough KI to protect everyone and anyone at risk.

It’s been seven years since Congress acted, and five years since the Academy issued its report, but today, nothing has changed. Workers in nuclear power plants have access to KI. Sailors on nuclear powered ships have KI. Those who live within 10 miles of a reactor allegedly have KI. But millions of Americans who are in danger have nothing.

Amazingly, earlier this year, the Chief Science Advisor at the Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Jerome A Donlon, MD, PhD, claimed that nothing more needs to be done. Echoing the Bush Administration, he says the best policy is to limit pre-incident distribution to nuclear facilities and rely upon evacuation for all other Americans.

Apparently, Dr. Donlon is willing to ignore Congress, every scientific analysis of the problem, as well as governmental experience with nuclear emergencies and massive evacuations. He also apparently has concluded that there is no risk of exposure to any American as a result of a dirty bomb or the hijacking of nuclear material found in every major American city.

President Obama, please correct this dangerous and irresponsible policy. Implement fully the 2002 Act. Implement all of the NAS recommendations. Make sure we’re all safe. It’s time to put our collective safety first.

Sincerely,