SCK•CEN
STUDIECENTRUM VOOR KERNENERGIE
CENTRE D'ETUDE DE L'ENERGIE NUCLEAIRE

Drs. Ing. Peter Torbijn
Ministerie van VROM
Directoraat-generaal Milieubeheer
Directie Risicobeleid
Afdeling Straling, Nucleaire en Bioveiligheid
Postbus 30945
NL - 2500 GX Den Haag (Nederland)

General Management
Phone + 32 14 33 25 90
Fax + 32 14 31 89 36
E-mail eric.van.walle@sckcen.be

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Dear Mr. Torbijn,

In reply to your letter, I would like to answer your three questions regarding the BR2 decisions for the radio-isotope production for 2009.

BR2 works at present according to a fixed schedule in order to allow for regular maintenance works and changes to the reactor load when needed for experiments. We are convinced that this working methodology is necessary to keep our reactor in shape and to guarantee at all times the safety of the reactor operations. At this moment we run 5 cycles/year that are spread over the year and we prepare this schedule well in advance (i.e. August 2008 for 2009). As such, the schedule for 2009 was originally fixed in August 2008.

To answer your questions (in different order but related to your numbering):

2. Due to the uncertainties that rose at the end of 2008 for the HFR-reactor to come on line in the first half of 2009, the Belgian Nuclear Research Center, SCK•CEN, decided at the end of December 2008 to modify the operating planning of the BR2 reactor during the first semester of 2009 to maximise the radio-isotope production in that period. This change led to an extra financial burden because of the delaying of experimental and commercial programmes besides the rescheduling of the personnel occupation for that period of time, but was accepted by our personnel as a necessary action to serve the radio-isotope production needs;
1. We consequently shifted all cycles of 2009 to the schedule given below, whereas to have the shortest maintenance and loading periods in the first half of 2009 and to include longer maintenance periods in the second half of 2009 when we will only have two cycles. All maintenance periods are necessary to keep up with legal standards or are necessary to comply with other running contractual research obligations that we have;
3. During the cycles given below we will maximize our radio-isotope production, but we cannot interfere anymore with the schedule: at most we could add a few days more to each cycle, but this will not avoid the regular shutdown periods in between the cycles. When one compares the cycles of OSIRIS and BR2 some time gaps will remain open, especially during the second half of 2009, when both OSIRIS and BR2 will produce less isotopes.

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It is important to emphasize that we at SCK•CEN are committed to produce as many radio-isotopes as we can to serve the international community, but that we, in the interest of that same community, cannot jeopardize the future safety of our installations and experiments. Safety will be the first criterion in all our operations and this in accordance with the Belgian Safety organisation.
From 2010 on we will increase the number of cycles at BR2 to 6 and we will also increase our production capacity, but the situation for 2009 is fixed as:

- BR2 Cycle 01/2009A : 13/01/2009 - 03/02/2009
- BR2 Cycle 02/2009A : 10/03/2009 - 31/03/2009
- BR2 Cycle 03/2009A : 17/04/2009 - 08/05/2009
- BR2 Cycle 04/2009A : 21/07/2009 - 18/08/2009
- BR2 Cycle 05/2009A : 23/10/2009 - 20/11/2009

Truly,

Eric van Walle
Director-general