

No. 91-142  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Wednesday, November 6, 1991)

NRC STAFF ISSUES LICENSE FOR DRY STORAGE OF SPENT FUEL  
AT COLORADO NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has issued a license authorizing Public Service Company of Colorado to possess spent nuclear fuel and related components from its Fort St. Vrain nuclear power plant in an independent spent fuel storage facility.

The independent spent fuel storage facility, which has been built on the Fort St. Vrain site near Greeley, Colorado, consists of six, air-cooled concrete vaults of a design similar to one previously approved by the NRC staff. It will be a part of Public Service Company's operations at the Fort St. Vrain site until the nuclear power plant has been decommissioned, then it will be operated as a stand-alone facility. The Fort St. Vrain facility, which used a high-temperature, gas-cooled reactor, was permanently shut down in August 1989.

Public Service Company's application to build and operate the independent spent fuel storage facility was subject to a safety review and environmental assessment by the NRC staff and an opportunity for a public hearing was provided. The State of Colorado petitioned to intervene in a hearing but withdrew its petition after reaching an agreement with the utility and the NRC staff providing for a full and open exchange of information on the siting and operation of the facility and a reasonable opportunity for the State to present its views and concerns about the application.

The NRC license authorizes possession of up to 1,482 spent fuel elements, 37 key-topped reflector control rod elements and six neutron source elements in carbon-steel, aluminum-coated fuel storage cannisters. Six spent fuel elements (two reflector elements may be substituted for any spent fuel element) will be contained in a fuel storage cannister and will be transported from the Fort St. Vrain reactor to the on-site facility in a NRC-approved shipping cask.

Public Service Company of Colorado has a commitment from the Department of Energy to store spent fuel from its Fort St. Vrain nuclear power plant at the Department's Idaho National Engineering Laboratory. However, shipments to Idaho have been suspended due to litigation with the State and local Indian Tribes. The litigation makes the availability of the Idaho storage facilities uncertain and there is no Federal Repository for commercial spent fuel, making the independent spent fuel storage facility at Fort St. Vrain necessary.

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