

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Office of Public Affairs  
Washington, DC 20555  
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234  
Internet: opa@nrc.gov

No. 96-108

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Thursday, August 1, 1996)

NRC, OSHA SIGN AGREEMENT ON WORKER PROTECTION  
AT URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) of the U.S. Department of Labor have agreed on a coordinated worker protection effort at the two gaseous diffusion plants near Piketon, Ohio, and Paducah, Kentucky.

The USEC Privatization Act requires the two agencies to enter into such an agreement.

U.S. Enrichment Corporation (USEC) operates the plants under a lease from the Department of Energy (DOE), the owner and former operator. The plants use a gaseous diffusion process to enrich uranium hexafluoride gas in the uranium-235 isotope, so that the material can be used as nuclear fuel in civilian nuclear power plants.

The Energy Policy Act of 1992, which established USEC, also required the NRC to set up a process for certifying that the enrichment plants are operated in a way that ensures protection of public health and safety. The act also made the operator of the plants subject to the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which OSHA administers.

NRC is currently reviewing USEC's applications for certification. DOE will continue to regulate the plants until the NRC assumes jurisdiction following a planned 120-day transition period after NRC's initial certification.

Under the NRC-OSHA agreement, the NRC will apply its standards to working conditions involving radiological hazards, while OSHA will apply its standards to conditions involving non-radiological hazards. Both agencies will apply their standards to conditions involving a combination of hazards (for example, if there are both radioactive materials and other hazardous chemicals in the same work area).

The agreement specifies how NRC and OSHA will coordinate their efforts--in areas such as inspections, issuance of citations, enforcement actions and response to worker safety or health complaints--to avoid duplication of effort and eliminate gaps in coverage.

If NRC or OSHA identifies a conflict between the two agencies' requirements--or if USEC perceives a conflict--both agencies will work together to resolve the issue promptly.

James M. Taylor, Executive Director for Operations, NRC, and Joseph A. Dear, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, signed the agreement for their respective agencies.

###