

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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No. 96-19

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Monday, January 29, 1996)

NRC SEEKS PUBLIC INPUT ON DRAFT REPORTS
REGARDING CLEANUP OF UTAH URANIUM MILL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is inviting public comments on draft environmental and technical reports regarding the Atlas Corporation's proposal for cleanup of uranium mill tailings at its site near Moab, Utah.

The NRC will hold a public meeting--to hear views on the two documents--at Star Hall, 155 East Center, in Moab at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28.

Interested persons may also submit written comments on the NRC reports to the Chief, High-Level Waste and Uranium Recovery Projects Branch, Division of Waste Management, Office of Safety and Safeguards, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555. The comments should be submitted within 60 days of a formal notice in the Federal Register--expected about January 30.

The uranium mill operated from 1956 until 1984 and has been owned by Atlas since 1962. Uranium is no longer being processed at the site. Atlas has been in the process of cleaning it up for several years. The company has proposed on-site disposal of the mill tailings resulting from the operation.

The first NRC report, "Draft Environmental Impact Statement Related to Reclamation of the Uranium Mill Tailings at the Atlas Site, Moab, Utah," identification number NUREG-1531, describes and evaluates the potential environmental impacts of three alternatives. When published in final form, the environmental impact statement will guide the NRC in reaching a decision on the cleanup plan.

Alternative #1 is Atlas' proposal to stabilize the tailings in place and leave them at the Moab site. The NRC staff's preliminary conclusion in the draft environmental statement is that this alternative is acceptable with respect to environmental costs and benefits.

Under a second option, Atlas would move all the tailings and other contaminated material to an alternate site. The primary advantage would be to free the current site near the Colorado

River for other uses and eliminate the potential for impacts to the river. Disadvantages primarily relate to the transport of the tailings to a new site and a longer period of construction. This alternative would be considerably more expensive than Alternative #1.

Alternative #3 is "no action." The NRC would make no licensing decision, and Atlas would cease operations involving management of the tailings. Because this alternative would not comply with regulations and is not environmentally acceptable, it was not evaluated in detail in the draft environmental statement.

The second report on which the NRC is seeking public comments is "Draft Technical Evaluation Report for the Proposed Revised Reclamation Plan for the Atlas Corporation Moab Mill," identification number NUREG-1532. It evaluates Atlas' proposed reclamation of the tailings with respect to NRC safety regulations. The NRC review identified 20 issues in geology, seismology, geotechnical engineering, erosion protection, water resources protection and radon control that preclude the agency from concluding that the Atlas proposal would meet applicable regulations. Atlas can provide further information to try to resolve these issues.

Interested persons may obtain free single copies of each of the reports from the NRC Publications Section, Attention: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 37082, Washington, DC 20013-7082. A copy of each document is also available for review and copying in the NRC Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, NW, Washington, DC.