

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC DENIES PETITIONS ON URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLANTS;
WILL ISSUE CERTIFICATES SOON

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has denied petitions requesting review of an initial decision by its Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards to issue certificates to the U.S. Enrichment Corporation (USEC) for uranium enrichment plants located near Paducah, Kentucky, and Portsmouth, Ohio.

The Director, NRC Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, will sign and issue the initial certificates shortly.

After a transition period following issuance of the certificates, regulatory authority over plant operations will be transferred from the Department of Energy (DOE) to the NRC on March 3, 1997.

The two enrichment plants are owned, and were formerly operated, by DOE. USEC now operates them under a lease from DOE. The plants use a gaseous diffusion process to enrich uranium hexafluoride gas in the uranium-235 isotope, so that the material can be used to produce nuclear fuel for civilian nuclear power plants.

The Energy Policy Act of 1992, which directed USEC operation of the enrichment plants, required the NRC to establish a certification process and safety and safeguards standards for the certification of the plants. NRC will certify the facilities periodically in the future for compliance with the standards. USEC must apply for certificate renewal by April 15, 1998.

The NRC staff published a Federal Register notice on September 19 announcing its initial decision to certify the plants and offering an opportunity for certain persons whose interest may be affected to request Commission review. The five petitions received were not approved, for the reasons discussed in a memorandum and order issued today by the Commission.

The NRC announced prior opportunities for public comment in the Federal Register on September 21 and November 14, 1995, and held public meetings on November 28, 1995, in Piketon, Ohio, and on December 5, 1995, in Paducah. Opportunities for public comment will be provided in the future for any certification

renewal.

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