

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
Region III Office of Public Affairs
801 Warrenville Road, Lisle, IL 60532-4351

NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT: RIII-99-01 January 4, 1999
CONTACT: Jan Strasma 630/829-9663
Angela Greenman 630/829-9662
E-mail: opa3@nrc.gov

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION TO DISCUSS FINDINGS
OF INSPECTION INTO DEC. 9 FIRE AT PORTSMOUTH URANIUM PLANT

A Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspection team will meet January 8 with U. S. Enrichment Corporation officials to discuss the preliminary findings of its review of a December 9 fire at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

The plant, which processes uranium for use as fuel for nuclear power plants, is located at Piketon, Ohio.

The meeting will be at 12 noon in the Piketon Research and Extension Center, Ohio State University, 1864 Skyville Road, Piketon. It is open to public observation. NRC Acting Region Administrator James Caldwell and other NRC staff members will be available after the meeting to answer questions from the news media and members of the public.

The fire occurred in the portion of the plant which removes extraneous gases from the processing system. It appeared to result from the unexpected overheating of metal components which ignited the uranium hexafluoride in the processing system. The system components were damaged, releasing a small amount of uranium hexafluoride into the building.

The plant fire brigade extinguished the fire in about 90 minutes. There were minor injuries to two plant workers and two fire fighters. Environmental surveys showed no evidence of a release of uranium outside the immediate area of the process building.

The NRC team, called an Augmented Inspection Team, will issue a written report in three to four weeks. The report will be posted on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/reports>.

#