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NRC DISPATCHES AUGMENTED INSPECTION TEAM TO REVIEW  
FIRE AT PORTSMOUTH GASEOUS DIFFUSION PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has dispatched an Augmented Inspection Team (AIT) to review the circumstances surrounding a fire which occurred this morning at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant, operated by the U.S. Enrichment Corp. (USEC) at Piketon, Ohio.

Preliminary information indicates that the fire -- which began about 6:10 a.m. in an electric motor located in a process building area -- was confined to that area and did not result in any chemical or radioactive releases outside the cell housing. Although some nearby equipment was damaged, no safety equipment was affected.

The plant's on-site fire brigade responded and extinguished the fire in about two hours. Four workers were treated at the plant for minor injuries from smoke inhalation and falls. About 24 people were evacuated from the building. At this time the cause of the fire is not precisely known.

The Portsmouth plant uses 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.

An NRC inspector was at the plant site during the fire. Inspectors from NRC headquarters and the regional midwest office, who will serve on the special team, will arrive at the plant site tonight. The AIT also will include chemical and fire protection specialists.

When the inspection is completed, the inspectors will meet with the company to discuss the preliminary findings. This meeting will be open to public observation. The schedule and location of the meeting will be announced later.

The NRC team will issue a written report which will be available to the public several weeks after the completion of the inspection.

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