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**NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$55,000 FINE AGAINST U.S. ENRICHMENT CORPORATION
FOR VIOLATIONS OF NRC SAFETY REQUIREMENTS AT PORTSMOUTH, OH, PLANT**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$55,000 fine against the U. S. Enrichment Corporation (USEC) for violations of nuclear safety requirements at its Portsmouth, Ohio, Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

The Portsmouth facility processes uranium for use in fuel for commercial nuclear power plants.

In notifying the company of the fine, NRC Regional Administrator A. Bill Beach said: "The violations involve major deficiencies in the nuclear criticality safety and self-assessment programs at the Portsmouth facility."

The nuclear criticality safety program is intended to control uranium in process and in storage to prevent a possible chain reaction – or criticality – which could produce unexpected energy and radiation.

"While the violations did not result in an immediate safety issue, the magnitude of the underlying problems indicate that USEC was not effective in identifying and promptly correcting these problems," Beach said.

"Significant NRC effort was necessary to focus USEC's corrective action processes in order to obtain comprehensive corrective actions," he added.

NRC inspections found numerous violations of the criticality safety program at Portsmouth, including storage of containers and equipment containing uranium without the required spacing between them, inadequate training of personnel, ineffectual USEC inspections and audits of the program, and failure to find and correct problems in the safe handling and storage of uranium.

USEC has until April 20 to pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the company may request a hearing.

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