



COGEMA

Mining, Inc.

March 29, 2001

**SUA-1341
DOCKET NO. 40-8502**

Mr. Phillip Ting, Chief
Fuel Cycle Licensing Branch, FCSS
c/o Document Control Desk
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Subject: Excursion Status Reporting of Monitor Well 5MW43

Dear Mr. Ting:

This letter is to confirm my telephone notification to the NRC Operations Center on March 22, 2001, regarding the excursion status of monitor well 5MW43. This well is one of the 8 monitor wells mentioned in my 3-1-01 letter, concerning the lack of groundwater available for sampling ore zone monitor wells located around Mine Unit 5 at Christensen which is undergoing groundwater sweep. The water levels dropped below the pump setting, forcing us to pull the pumps and use a bailing system to obtain thief samples. As mentioned in the 3-1-01 letter, this sampling method is difficult to conduct and does not provide a representative sample of the surrounding formation.

A monthly thief sample was collected on March 21, 2001 from monitor well 5MW43, which showed significant increases in conductivity and alkalinity and exceeded their upper control limits (UCLs). A confirmation thief sample was collected on March 22, which also exceeded these 2 UCLs. The well was then placed on excursion status and its sampling frequency increased to weekly. COGEMA feels that this is not a true excursion because no increase in chloride occurred, which is most reliable excursion indicator. In addition, the pH was abnormally high (higher than the formation or the wellfield pH).

The table below provides sample analysis data for monitor well 5MW43 from 3-22-01 to date. Note that since the recovery flow was reduced in Mine Unit 5, the water level elevation began increasing with the 3-26-01 sample. This sample showed a noticeable drop in both conductivity and alkalinity concentrations. On 3-28-01, the water level increased enough for a pumped sample to be obtained. This sample showed normal concentrations of pH, conductivity and alkalinity, with no UCLs exceeded.

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Sample analysis data for monitor well 5MW43. Bold values exceed the UCL.

Sample Date	Chloride mg/l UCL 18.0	Conductivity umhos/cm UCL 685	Alkalinity mg/l UCL 131.1	Uranium mg/l as U3O8	pH	Water Level Elevation
3-21-01	7.5	1116	163.0	< 0.4	11.1	4489.2
3-22-01	7.4	1133	169.0	< 0.4	11.2	4489.2
3-26-01	7.7	1034	141.4	< 0.4	11.2	4496.2
* 3-28-01	8.1	682	117.7	< 0.4	9.0	4505.5

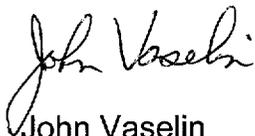
*pumped sample; all other are thief samples obtained with a bailing system

Since pumped samples can again be obtained from monitor well 5MW43, it is anticipated that the excursion parameters will remain normal and below their UCLs. Once 3 consecutive weeks occur without exceeding 2 or more UCLs, the well will be reported off excursion status.

COGEMA requested in the 3-1-01 letter to temporarily suspend sampling perimeter ore zone monitor wells, whenever their water levels drop below the maximum depth for pump setting. If this is approved, other false excursion reports resulting from an inadequate sampling method can be avoided. We urge you to expedite the 3-1-01 request.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this report.

Sincerely,



John Vaselin
Radiation Safety Officer

cc: Division Director/NRC, Arlington, TX
Donna Wichers - COGEMA