February 27, 2001

TO: ALL URANIUM RECOVERY PROGRAM LICENSEES ON THE ATTACHED
            LIST

SUBJECT: STREAMLINED LICENSING PROCESS

I am writing to advise you of changes that have been made to the Fuel Cycle Licensing Branch procedures, in an effort to streamline our review process. Our goal is to improve staff efficiency and effectiveness and to continue to protect the public health and safety and common defense and security, while meeting your business needs. Also, we have initiated changes to improve management of licensing projects, which will help to address concerns some licensees have raised regarding unnecessary regulatory burden. Our changes fall into several distinct areas discussed below.

Goals: We have clearly established our review goals to include safety of licensed operations, efficient use of U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and licensee staff time in completing reviews, and dependability, predictability, and suitability of NRC review completions within acceptable timeframes.

Empowering Reviewers: We will continue to use only highly qualified individuals to perform licensing reviews, and will ensure that reviewer qualifications are adequate for the work assigned. We also will continue to rely on our reviewers' expertise in determining acceptability of licensee proposals from safety, environmental, and regulatory perspectives, bringing management attention to bear as needed to resolve more complex policy and resource issues. We are empowering our reviewers by making them responsible and accountable for promptly identifying and resolving all issues within their review areas, for producing quality regulatory products, and for keeping reviews on schedule. We expect Project Managers to be knowledgeable of review issues as they arise, and to seek management and licensee involvement as needed to ensure prompt resolution. We believe this achieves more effective use of review time and more rapid resolution of licensing issues.

Standard Review Plans: To ensure requests for additional information (RAIs) are appropriately focused, they will be guided to the maximum extent possible by the use of available Standard Review Plans (SRPs) and guidance.

Acceptance Reviews: To achieve our goal of efficient and effective use of NRC resources, the staff will perform more demanding acceptance reviews to ensure that initial applications contain sufficient information to form the basis for an initial review. The staff will not hesitate to decline to accept applications that do not contain an appropriate scope of information to support a detailed technical and regulatory review. In declining an application, the staff would identify major information deficiencies that, if not adequately addressed in the resubmitted application, would likely result in significant RAIs. The staff also will identify associated guidance (e.g., SRPs, Regulatory Guides, and Technical Positions) for providing this information. Pre-licensing informal consultations (under 10 CFR 2.102) before and after the acceptance review to discuss deficiencies and applicable guidance will be encouraged by the staff.

Early Safety Evaluation Reports: The staff is expected to begin writing the Safety Evaluation Report (SER) or Technical Evaluation Report (TER) during the initial review of the application, to ensure that all issues are identified as early in the review as possible. This process raises complex unique issues to management's attention early in the review for prompt resolution.

Requests for Additional Information: Overall, we believe the RAI process is an area where improvement is essential to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our reviews. Our objective is to greatly reduce the number of RAIs issued. Ideally, therefore, we would like to have no (zero) RAIs for new applications and amendments after the acceptance review.   We expect that licensees will consider available guidance in developing applications that present a compelling safety demonstration in accordance with NRC requirements. For our part, we will hold reviewers accountable for ensuring that no RAIs are issued that are not required to show reasonable assurance of compliance with the regulations. We expect that licensee/applicant responses to RAIs will be high-quality, responsive, complete, and timely. We will schedule appropriate time for licensee response to RAIs. Within 4 weeks of receiving a response to an RAI, we will complete a review of the responses to determine whether and how the review should proceed. If more than two rounds of RAIs are needed for the same issue, the staff will identify its positions and concerns and suspend further technical review. In such a case, the staff will arrange to conduct an open meeting with the applicant to discuss issues, and if a satisfactory resolution cannot be achieved, will proceed to issue the staff SER, but deny the applicant's request.

Licensing Teams: For review cases where it is advantageous, dedicated review teams will be established and maintained to ensure that appropriate and knowledgeable reviewers are available as needed and to ensure continuity through completion.   Although we do this already in a less formal manner, we will emphasize more strongly this aspect of our review work.

Meetings: We are arranging early meetings, either in person or by telephone, whenever we believe this will lead to quicker resolution of questions and issues or when some information is needed to develop an appropriate RAI in writing. Moreover, we encourage open meetings, as needed, before application submittal, to discuss issues, alert staff to new or innovative proposals or designs, or to discuss the most expedient method to conduct the licensing review. In addition, we encourage meetings and/or telecons after the issuance of an RAI, either to ensure full understanding of the NRC staff's request, or to discuss how the licensee/applicant intends to address technical or other issues raised in the RAI. Lastly, the staff encourages meetings at any time the licensee/applicant believes a meeting would be productive.

Overall, our goals continue to be to ensure adequate safety; enhance public confidence; make NRC activities more effective, efficient and realistic; and reduce unnecessary burden on licensees. We hope you will find the aforementioned elements consistent with your business expectations, and would appreciate any feedback on this initiative. If you would like to discuss this or any other licensing matter, please feel free to contact me at (301) 415-7156 or Dan Gillen, Chief of the Uranium Recovery Section, at (301) 415-7295 or by e-mail to DMG2@nrc.gov.

February 27, 2001

In accordance with 10 CFR 2.790 of the NRC's "Rules of Practice," a copy of this letter will be available electronically for public inspection in the NRC Public Document Room or from the Publicly Available Records (PARS) component of NRC's document system (ADAMS). ADAMS is accessible from the NRC Web site at http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/ADAMS/index.html (the Public Electronic Reading Room).

Sincerely,

/RA/

Phil Ting, Chief
Fuel Cycle Licensing Branch
Division of Fuel Cycle Safety and Safeguards
Office of Nuclear Material Safety
  and Safeguards

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                                        Sincerely,

                                           /RA/

                                        Phil Ting, Chief
                                        Fuel Cycle Licensing Branch
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                                          and Safeguards

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