



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS -- REGION I

475 Allendale Road
King of Prussia, PA 19406

No. I-03-001

CONTACT: Diane Screnci, (610) 337-5330
Neil A. Sheehan, (610) 337-5331

January 3, 2003

E-mail: opa1@nrc.gov

NRC, COMPANY TO DISCUSS DECOMMISSIONING OF LAKEHURST, N.J., SITE

A New Jersey company's failure to complete the decommissioning of a site containing radioactive materials within the required timeframe will be the subject of a meeting between Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff and representatives of the firm on Wednesday, January 8.

The predecisional enforcement conference regarding the site, which is located off Route 70 in Lakehurst, N.J., and owned by Heritage Minerals, Inc., is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. in the Public Meeting Room at the NRC Region I Office, 475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa. Members of the public can observe the business portion of the meeting and will have an opportunity to ask questions or discuss issues with NRC staff before the session is adjourned.

The site in question had been used for mining and processing local monazite ores to extract heavy minerals. ASARCO, Inc., began operation at the site in 1973, followed by Heritage Minerals, which ceased processing operations in August 1990. The processing of the ores resulted in a waste pile containing natural thorium and uranium in sufficient quantities to require an NRC license.

In November 1997, Heritage Minerals submitted a decommissioning plan to the NRC. Under the plan, a contractor was to dispose of the monazite sand pile and clean up residual radioactivity in mill buildings and on equipment to meet NRC guidelines for unrestricted use. The plan was approved by the NRC in October 1999, requiring completion of the work within two years.

Decommissioning activities got under way in June 2001, with Heritage Minerals subsequently notifying the NRC that the work had been completed as of August 2001.

However, NRC confirmatory surveys conducted at the site in December 2001 found that radiological contamination remained on and around the monazite pile area and in the mill buildings. The surveys also determined the site did not meet NRC guidelines for unrestricted release. In addition, concerns were identified in the company's methodology for measuring surface contamination on the mill structures.

Heritage Minerals, in a report submitted to the NRC in November 2002, acknowledged that licensable quantities of radioactive material remained in areas east and south of one of the mill buildings, and that additional site characterization and remediation were needed.

The NRC has notified the company that a failure to complete the decommissioning work within the required two-year timeframe constitutes an apparent violation of agency requirements.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that the NRC has made a final determination that a violation or violations did occur or that enforcement action, such as a monetary fine, will be taken. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the apparent violation or violations, their causes and safety significance. The meeting will also provide Heritage Minerals with an opportunity to point out any errors that may have been made in the NRC inspection report and to present its corrective actions.

No decision on the apparent violation or violations or any enforcement action will be made at this conference. Those decisions will be made by senior NRC officials at a later time.

###