



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, DC 20555-0001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Web Site: www.nrc.gov

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NRC TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETINGS TO DISCUSS DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ON PROPOSED MOX NUCLEAR FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will hold public meetings March 25-27 in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina to discuss environmental impacts of the proposed Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

The meetings follow publication of the NRC's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which includes the NRC staff's preliminary NEPA recommendation that, unless safety issues mandate otherwise, NRC approve a license for construction and operation of the plant, with conditions for enhancing protection of the environment. NRC staff members will explain the findings in the DEIS and receive oral and written public comments at the public meetings.

Duke Cogema Stone & Webster (DCS), a contractor of the Department of Energy, is proposing to build the MOX facility at the Savannah River Site near Aiken, South Carolina. If NRC approves, DCS could build a MOX facility that would convert surplus weapons-grade plutonium, supplied by the DOE, into fuel for use in a limited number of commercial nuclear power reactors. Commercial nuclear power plants in the United States currently use only uranium in fresh fuel; the mixed oxide fresh fuel would use a combination of uranium and plutonium. Converting weapons-grade plutonium into MOX fuel helps advance the cause of nonproliferation by converting the material into a form unsuitable for use in weapons of mass destruction.

The DEIS discusses the proposed action as well as alternatives, including the no-action alternative. The discussion of the no-action alternative evaluates the environmental impacts of continuing to store surplus plutonium in various DOE facilities nationwide, in the event NRC decides not to approve the MOX facility. Alternatives considered, but not analyzed in detail, include alternative locations for the facility within the Savannah River Site, alternative technology and design options, immobilization of surplus plutonium instead of producing MOX fuel, deliberately making off-specification MOX fuel (which would be unsuitable for use in reactors and placed directly into spent fuel storage facilities), and the Parallex Project, which involves irradiating the MOX fuel in Canadian CANDU reactors. Additionally, the DEIS compares the impacts of using HEPA filters to the impact of using sand filters for removal of particulate air emissions from the proposed facility.

After issuing the DEIS, the NRC discovered that the accident consequences in the DEIS are overestimated. NRC anticipates it will revise the estimated 1-year public dose from hypothetical accidents to lower values. NRC has notified stakeholders and plans to discuss this issue at the public meeting and in a *Federal Register* notice. NRC will also post information regarding the error and changes to the DEIS on the MOX web site listed below.

The public meetings will be held as follows:

- **March 25** at the Coastal Georgia Center, located at 305 Fahm Street, Savannah, Georgia;
- **March 26** at the North Augusta Community Center, 495 Brookside Avenue, North Augusta, South Carolina; and
- **March 27** at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center, located at 600 E. Fourth Street in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Each meeting will include an Open House session from 5:30 until 7 p.m., during which NRC staff will be available informally to discuss the MOX project and answer questions. The formal public meetings will be held from 7 until 10 p.m. Individuals wishing to make oral comments must register before the start of the meetings. Individual comments may have to be limited due to high demand and the time available.

In addition to the public meetings, interested parties may submit written comments for consideration by the NRC staff. To be certain of consideration, comments must be postmarked by May 14 (a 30-day extension of the deadline originally published in the *Federal Register*). Comments may be submitted to: Michael T. Lesar, Chief, Rules and Directives Branch, Division of Administrative Services, Office of Administration, Mail Stop T-6D59, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555. Comments may also be submitted by e-mail to teh@nrc.gov or by fax to 301-415-5398, Attention: Tim Harris.

The DEIS is available for public review through the NRC electronic reading room: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/sr1767/> . A selected group of documents on which the DEIS is based is available on the MOX web page: <http://www.nrc.gov/materials/fuel-cycle-fac/mox/licensing.html> . Documents may also be obtained by contacting NRC's Public Document Room (PDR) at 301-415-4737 or 1-800-397-4209. The PDR can also provide assistance in using the electronic reading room on NRC's web page.

For general information on the environmental review process, contact Tim Harris at 301-415-6613. For technical information associated with the proposed MOX facility, please contact Drew Persinko at 301-415-6522.

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