



NRC NEWS

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NRC RECERTIFIES TWO GASEOUS DIFFUSION PLANTS OPERATED BY UNITED STATES ENRICHMENT CORPORATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has recertified two gaseous diffusion plants (GDPs) operated by the United States Enrichment Corporation (USEC).

The recertifications, valid until December 31, 2008, allow USEC to continue operating the plants near Paducah, Kentucky, and Portsmouth, Ohio. The recertifications are required under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 (AEA), as amended by the Energy Policy Act of 1992, which created USEC. The certifications establish that the plants are in compliance with safety, safeguards and security regulations established by the NRC for these facilities.

The NRC has also issued to Congress a report on the operation of the GDPs, covering the period from October 1, 1998, to September 30, 2003. The report is required by the AEA not later than the date on which a certification is issued. Two earlier reports were issued in 1998 and 1999, along with previous certifications, before Congress changed the reporting and certification requirement from annually to as long as every five years.

During the five-year period covered by the current report, the Paducah and Portsmouth GDPs have provided adequate protection of health, safety, safeguards, security, and environmental conditions, and have generally operated in compliance with NRC regulations. Identified violations of NRC regulatory requirements have been adequately addressed by corrective actions. Offsite radiological doses, as well as doses to workers, have been kept very low and well within applicable limits. There have been only two events requiring activation of USEC's emergency response center, at the Portsmouth GDP, and no events resulting in a significant release of radioactive material. The NRC conducted licensee performance reviews at both GDPs in late 2002 with acceptable results.

In May 2001, USEC terminated enrichment operations at the Portsmouth GDP. USEC phased out most shipment and transfer operations of enriched uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) at the Portsmouth GDP in June 2002, shifting those operations to the Paducah facility, which began producing enriched uranium at an assay of up to 5.5 percent of uranium-235 in early 2002. USEC is maintaining the Portsmouth GDP in a standby condition under contract to DOE. The company also has applied to the NRC for a license to construct a lead cascade gas centrifuge enrichment facility at Portsmouth.

USEC submitted applications for the recertifications last April. The NRC's decision to grant the recertifications was based on the staff's assessment that USEC met the requirements for renewal, as well as other NRC requirements such as new security measures required in orders issued on June 17, 2002.

The report to Congress will be available through the NRC's ADAMS document retrieval system, at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html> , using the search term ML032901096. The letter transmitting the report to Congress, dated December 17, will be available using ML033290172 as the search term.

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