



NRC NEWS

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NRC AUTHORIZES CONSTRUCTION OF MIXED-OXIDE FUEL FABRICATION FACILITY AT SAVANNAH RIVER SITE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has authorized Duke, Cogema, Stone & Webster (DCS) to construct a facility at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina to manufacture mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel for eventual use in commercial nuclear power plants. The NRC staff performed environmental and safety reviews to ensure that the facility's design will have minimal environmental impacts and will protect the public health and safety. Although in accordance with NRC procedures the staff has issued the construction authorization, the adjudicatory process on certain issues remains open.

The facility, which will be owned by the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration, is part of a bilateral effort between the United States and the Russian Federation to make supplies of surplus weapons-grade plutonium into more proliferation-resistant forms. Converting the plutonium into MOX fuel will enable it to be used in commercial reactors to generate electricity. In the United States, only those reactors authorized by the NRC will be permitted to use MOX fuel.

A public version of the NRC's final safety evaluation report for the construction of the MOX fuel fabrication facility is available on the agency's Web site at this address: <http://www.nrc.gov/site-help/new-content.html> . This report addresses regulatory requirements for approval of construction and reflects the NRC staff's conclusion that DCS' design bases for the facility provide reasonable assurance of protection against natural phenomena and the consequences of potential accidents. The NRC's environmental impact statement on the construction and operation of the proposed facility is available at <http://www.nrc.gov/materials/fuel-cycle-fac/mox/licensing.html> .

DCS, which is a contractor for DOE, must still apply for a nuclear materials license before it can take possession of special nuclear material and begin fabricating the MOX fuel. In reviewing that license application, the NRC will conduct additional safety reviews.

Although the NRC staff has issued the construction authorization, parties in the adjudicatory hearing before the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board will have an opportunity to submit late-filed contentions challenging the staff's safety review.

On March 3, NRC granted a license amendment to Duke Energy Corp., allowing it to test four MOX fuel assemblies at its Catawba nuclear plant near Rock Hill, S.C. Those lead test assemblies have been manufactured in France using surplus U.S. weapons-grade plutonium.

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