

February 1, 2006

NOTE TO COMMISSIONERS' ASSISTANTS

OCM/NJD

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cc Roger Davis  
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FROM: William M. Dean **/RA/**  
Assistant for Operations, OEDO

SUBJECT: UNAVAILABILITY OF ARGONNE FACILITY HOT CELL FACILITY

The NRC staff have been informed of the potential loss of use of the Alpha Gamma Hot Cell Facility (AGHCF) at a DOE laboratory (Argonne) that is being used for NRC programmatic work. The staff recently issued a new three-year statement of work for services provided by Argonne National Laboratory to complete research on high-burnup fuel with advanced cladding materials. This work supports rulemaking-related activities (10 CFR 50.46(b) LOCA criteria) in the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation and licensing activities (casks for spent fuel) in the Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards. This work is being done in cooperation with EPRI, Framatome, Westinghouse, and DOE-NE. Some of NRC's work on irradiated fuel rods needs to be performed in the AGHCF. It was announced on January 16 that the AGHCF will no longer be available for programmatic work. Nevertheless, the facility will remain open for similar activities.

A letter (ML060200283) was recently sent from the RES director to the Argonne National Laboratory director requesting that NRC's work be allowed to continue. The technical staff working on NRC's program have moved some equipment out of the AGHCF area into a shielded non-nuclear facility such that all work that does not involve irradiated UO2 will be carried out in non-nuclear facilities. Because defueled irradiated cladding can be handled in this non-nuclear facility, the move will reduce the total amount of work for NRC in the AGHCF by about 80%. With this reduction, we are optimistic that the laboratory will be able to accommodate the balance of NRC's work in the AGHCF. The staff is also looking at contingency plans using other facilities, although that would result in substantial delays in anticipated regulatory activities.

Enclosure: As stated

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