UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON NUCLEAR WASTE
WASHINGTON, DC 20555 - 0001

June 1, 2007

MEMORANDUM TO: ACNW&M Members

FROM: Antonio F. Dias, Chief /***RA***/
Technical Support Branch, ACRS/ACNW&M

SUBJECT: TRANSMITTAL OF TRIP REPORT BY ACNW&M STAFF ON NRC/NATIONAL MINING ASSOCIATION URANIUM RECOVERY WORKSHOP AND NRC STAFF MEETINGS WITH URANIUM RECOVERY STAKEHOLDERS HELD IN DENVER, COLORADO ON MAY 14-17, 2007

Attached is Dr. Latif Hamdan trip report on NRC/National Mining Association Uranium Recovery Workshop and NRC staff meetings with uranium recovery stakeholders held in Denver, Colorado on May 14-17, 2007. The purpose of ACNW&M staff participation in these activities was to obtain information that support Committee reviews and recommendations to the Commission with regard to the impending rulemaking activities on groundwater protection at in situ leach uranium recovery facilities.

Attachment: Trip Report

cc w/Attachment: F. Gillespie
C. Miller
K. McConnell
W. VonTill
S. Jones
ACNW&M Staff

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Trip Report
NRC/National Mining Association Uranium Recovery Workshop
and NRC Staff Meetings with Uranium Recovery Stakeholders
Held in Denver, Colorado on May 14-17, 2007
Latif Hamdan, Senior Staff Scientist
Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste and Materials (ACNW&M)

Dr. Latif Hamdan (ACNW&M staff) attended the annual NRC/National Mining Association (NMA) Uranium Recovery (UR) Workshop and other NRC staff meetings with stakeholders held in Denver, Colorado on May 14-17, 2007. The purpose of ACNW&M staff participation in these activities was to obtain information that support Committee reviews and recommendations to the Commission with regard to the impending rulemaking activities on groundwater protection at in situ leach (ISL) uranium recovery facilities.

Summary and Highlights

The two-day UR workshop was held on May 15-16, 2007. The workshop was the largest attended NMA UR workshop ever, with nearly 200 participants and virtually all stakeholders represented. Participants included representatives from the NRC, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), nine states (Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming), Native Americans (Navajo Nation), and members of the public. Native Americans and the public appeared to be under represented. The workshop was well organized and conducted. It included a total of 18 presentations and two stakeholders forums. Some participants seemed to have considerable knowledge and experience in UR. Also, the location was key: Denver is a convenient location for the majority of the stakeholders.

On May 14, 2007, the day preceding the workshop, the NRC staff held a total of 10 separate meetings with UR stakeholders, including eight open meetings with different UR licensees and new applicants, and two closed meetings with representatives of the State of Wyoming and DOE's Office of Legacy Management. The meetings were focused, efficient, and I believe effective.

The NRC was represented by staff from the Office of Federal and State Materials and Environmental Management Programs (FSME) and Region IV. The NRC staff gave several presentations at the workshop, and ably answered questions throughout the workshop and during meetings with the stakeholders.

Interest in UR is high. The uranium mining industry is energized, and NRC staff are embracing for an increased UR licensing workload. A total of about 25 applications requiring licensing actions for new UR operations (14 applications) or restarts/expansions of existing facilities (11 applications) are expected in 2008 and 2009, although the actual numbers will change. ISL is currently the uranium mining method of choice for most applications, but there are several applications that will use conventional mining. Issues of concern to the UR licensees and applicants include the licensing and permitting processes, safety and environmental review times and schedules, and regulatory bottlenecks. Issues of concern to Federal and state agencies include ongoing and planned updates and/or modifications of regulations and standards (EPA, NRC, Texas, Wyoming), as well as uncertainty about the actual licensing workload and associated manpower and resource/budget issues. Specific safety and environmental issues discussed are the restoration of groundwater quality in the mined zone;

protection of groundwater quality and safety of drinking water sources in non-exempted aquifers adjoining, above, and below the mined zone; proper application of the ACL standard; meeting the ALARA requirement; and the use of a generic environmental impact statement (GEIS) to expedite environmental reviews. Issues that did not seem to receive sufficient coverage include onsite disposal of effluents, and decommissioning and license termination of ISL operations.

Suggested ACNW&M Follow-Up Action

To further prepare the Committee for forthcoming reviews of the rulemaking documents, the Committee may consider the following suggested follow-up actions: (1) Visits by cognizant Committee member(s) with DOE's Office of Legacy Management in Grand Junction, Colorado to obtain information and lessons learned from decommissioning of UR tailings sites; (2) Visits by cognizant Committee member(s) or briefings to the Committee by representatives of selected states and Native American organizations to gauge the local government perspectives and issues of concern to them with regard to ISL mining and the NRC rulemaking; (3) A briefing on the development of a GEIS for ISL applications that is currently under consideration by the NRC staff; and (4) Briefings by the NRC staff on planned updates of NRC UR regulatory guides.