



UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC, EPA SIGN AGREEMENT ON REGULATORY ACTIONS CONCERNING UNC-CHURCHROCK URANIUM MILL SITE IN NEW MEXICO

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have entered into a formal Memorandum of Understanding which provides an orderly regulatory approach to the reclamation of the UNC-Churchrock Uranium Mill site, 17 miles northeast of Gallup in McKinley County, New Mexico.

This agreement was signed on August 26 in Dallas by Robert D. Martin, NRC Region IV Administrator, and by Robert E. Layton Jr., EPA Region VI Administrator.

EPA and NRC share responsibilities at the site, located in the Pipeline Arroyo Canyon, about a mile south of the Navajo Indian reservation. United Nuclear Corporation (UNC), owner of the property, operated a uranium mill there from mid-1977 until mid-1982, utilizing an acid leach, solvent extraction method to remove uranium from ore which came from nearby mines. The site now consists of both the inactive mill complex and a tailings disposal area with about 3.5 million tons of mill tailings.

NRC has under review a site reclamation plan, which UNC filed last year, for decommissioning the mill and reclaiming the tailings area. EPA, which has the mill on its Superfund priority list, is now considering results of a remedial investigation and feasibility study. It is evaluating five possible remedies for contaminated groundwater which has seeped into aquifers outside the byproducts material disposal area.

The NRC-EPA agreement generally provides for NRC to assume the role of lead regulatory agency for reclamation of the byproduct material disposal area and for site closure activities. EPA is to monitor all of these activities and may comment on them directly to NRC.

NRC also agrees to require that the Churchrock mill owners and operators implement an approved reclamation plan that will meet agency ground water protection requirements; to see that this plan and other relevant documents are provided to EPA; and to report quarterly on the site clean-up activities.

C-13