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NRC Issues Confirmatory Order to Homestake Mining Co. Over Decommissioning Work at New Mexico Uranium Mill Site

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission last week issued a [Confirmatory Order](#) to Homestake Mining Co. of California outlining actions the company agreed to take in implementing a groundwater cleanup program at the uranium mill undergoing decommissioning in Grants, N.M.

The Grants site received uranium ore from several local mines and performed milling operations from 1958 to 1990. Tailings generated from milling operations were placed into two piles on site, which in 1975 were found to have contaminated the groundwater. The company began implementing a groundwater protection plan in 1977. Homestake received an NRC license in 1986 to possess residual uranium and byproduct material generated by past milling operations at the Grants site. Homestake is processing groundwater under an NRC-approved Corrective Action Program and carrying out other activities to decommission the site.

The order finalizes commitments company officials made under the NRC's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process to address [apparent violations](#) of the NRC-approved groundwater Corrective Action Program. The NRC found the apparent violations during records inspections from October 2014 to May 2016. They include the discharge of water that exceeded site standards; the discharge of water containing byproduct material to unauthorized locations; failure to obtain liquid effluent samples and report the results; and the injection of water using a method inconsistent with the groundwater Corrective Action Program.

Homestake took immediate corrective actions to comply with NRC requirements. Homestake will also evaluate the impact of the violations to public health and safety. The NRC has no immediate public health and safety concerns, because the apparent violations did not result in the public being exposed to contaminated groundwater.

The company requested the ADR process to resolve differences with the NRC and discuss corrective actions. The process uses a neutral mediator with no decision-making authority to assist the parties in reaching an agreement or resolving any differences regarding a dispute. As a result of the settlement agreement, Homestake made a number of commitments in addition to the immediate actions to come into compliance with NRC requirements. Homestake will submit a root cause protocol to an independent third party and the NRC for review, and use the protocol to analyze the reasons for the violations. Within 60 days of completing its root cause analysis, Homestake will propose additional corrective actions to the NRC. It will assess all its activities, with further review by an independent third party, to determine whether they comply with NRC requirements and identify any areas of the

license requiring clarification, corrective action or amendment. The assessment will include a review of the company's safety culture.

Homestake will also revise its groundwater program and submit it for NRC review and approval by the end of 2018. It will enhance the annual and refresher training for anyone doing work under the license, ensure work complies with the terms of the license and the approved groundwater program, and report effluent and environmental monitoring results to the NRC twice a year. The NRC is satisfied its concerns will be addressed by making the company's commitments legally binding through the Confirmatory Order.