

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

memorandum

Albuquerque Operations Office

H. to: Andreé Gibbs

DATE MAY 4 1981

REPLY TO UNTRA:ALG
ATTN OF

SUBJECT Notice of Intent to Prepare Durango EIS

TO Robert J. Stern, Director, NEPA Affairs Division, EP-12, DOE Headquarters

Attached is the draft Notice of Intent for the preparation of an EIS and the public scoping meeting at Durango, Colorado. The NOI is based on the same format as those of Salt Lake City and Canonsburg, which were previously approved by your office.

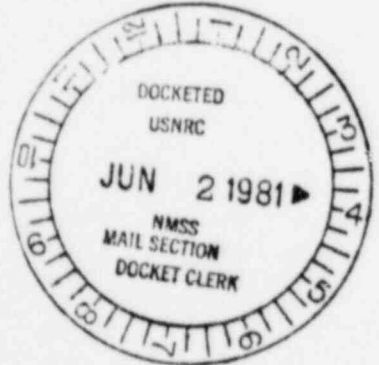
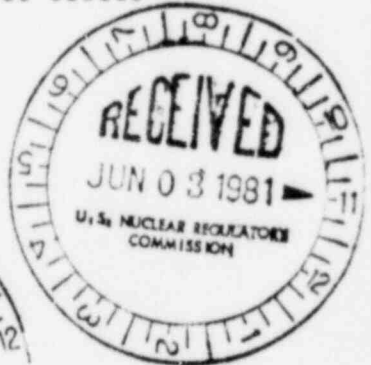
Because of the short time frame allowed between now and the scoping meeting, it is requested that your office expedite coordination and approval of the document. If you have any questions concerning the NOI, please call A. L. Gonzales of my staff at FTS 844-3941 or Felton Bingham of Sandia at FTS 844-8816.



Richard H. Campbell
Richard H. Campbell, Project Manager
Uranium Mill Tailings Project Office

Attachment

cc w/attachment:
R. Ramsey, RAPSO, NE-301, DOE HQS
A. Hazle, Colorado Dept of Health
R. Scarano, NRC



FEE EXEMPT

Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act: Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Conduct a Public Scoping Meeting for Remedial Actions at the Inactive Uranium Mill Tailings Site near Durango, Colorado.

AGENCY: Department of Energy

ACTION: Notice is hereby given that the Department of Energy intends to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to assess the environmental implications of remedial actions to be performed on the inactive uranium mill tailings piles near Durango, Colorado.

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE) announces its intent to prepare an EIS, in accordance with Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to provide environmental input into the selection of an appropriate strategy for the permanent disposal of the uranium mill tailings at the site of a now-dismantled uranium mill formerly owned by the Vanadium Corporation of America. The DOE is currently considering as its proposed action the removal of the tailings to a specially prepared remote site for permanent disposal. In accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for compliance with NEPA (40 CFR Part 1501), the DOE is serving as the lead agency for preparation of the EIS; the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will participate as a cooperating agency.

The DOE invites interested agencies, organizations, and members of the general public to submit comments or suggestions for consideration in connection with the preparation of the draft EIS. Comments or suggestions to assist the DOE in identifying significant environmental issues and the appropriate scope of the draft EIS are requested. Comments may be submitted by mail or presented at a scoping meeting to be held in Durango, Colorado, on June 29, 1981. On completion of the draft EIS, notice of its availability will be announced in the Federal Register, and comments will be solicited. Comments on the draft EIS will be considered in preparing the final EIS.

ADDRESS: Written comments or suggestions on the scope of the EIS and requests to speak at the scoping meeting may be submitted to

Mr. R. H. Campbell
Uranium Mill Tailings Project Office
Albuquerque Operations Office
Department of Energy
P.O. Box 5400
Albuquerque, NM 87115

Envelopes should be marked "DEIS for Durango tailings piles."

General information on the process followed by the DOE in preparing environmental impact statements may be obtained from

NEPA Affairs Division
Office of Environmental Compliance and Overview
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Environmental Protection, Safety,
and Emergency Preparedness
U.S. Department of Energy
ATTN: Ms. Carol M. Borgstrom
Room 4G-064, Forrestal Building
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20585
(202) 252-4600

DATES: Written comments postmarked by July 13, 1981 will be considered in the preparation of the DEIS. Comments postmarked after that date will be considered to the maximum extent practicable. A scoping meeting will be held in Durango, Colorado, on June 29, 1981. Requests to speak at this meeting should be received by R. H. Campbell at the above address by June 17, 1981.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The uranium mill tailings at the former Vanadium Corporation of America site are on the southwest side of Durango, just outside the city limits. The mill built on the site in 1942 originally processed vanadium ore. From 1943 to 1946 it reprocessed the vanadium tailings to recover uranium. Between 1949 and 1963 it processed uranium ore for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission. Although the mill buildings have been removed, the tailings from the operations remain in two piles lying against a mountain slope and covering about 21 acres.

In 1978 the U.S. Congress passed the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act, Public Law 95-604. In this Act the Congress found that uranium mill tailings may pose a significant radiation health hazard to the public and directed the DOE to designate processing sites for remedial action to remove this potential hazard. It required the DOE to carry out remedial action at each site in cooperation with other agencies and with the states and Indian tribes affected by the action. It gave to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) responsibility for consulting with the DOE over a range of subjects concerning the conduct of the remedial action, for concurring with the selected remedial action and with any cooperative agreement with a state or Indian tribe, and for licensing the maintenance of each tailings-disposal site

after the remedial action is completed,. In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was given the responsibility to set standards to protect public health, safety, and the environment at the tailings sites and the disposal sites.

In accordance with Public Law 95-604, the DOE has designated 25 sites for remedial action. One of them is the site outside Durango. The DOE has made preliminary assessments of the tailings piles there and of possible remedial actions. The State of Colorado has investigated several areas in which the tailings might safely be permanently disposed of and has recommended four of them as possible candidates for further study. The DOE has selected three of these sites for analysis in the draft EIS. To most expeditiously fulfill its role in overseeing the remedial action, the NRC has decided to participate as a "cooperating agency" as defined by the NEPA. By participating in this manner, the NRC will avoid duplicating the DOE efforts in a separate NRC-prepared EIS for the Durango tailings. The EPA has issued proposed standards governing the cleanup and disposal of residual radioactive material at inactive uranium processing sites, including the site near Durango, and intends to issue final standards by late 1981.

A document describing the preliminary assessments of the Durango tailings is the "Phase II Title I Engineering Assessment of Inactive Uranium Mill Tailings, Durango Site, Durango, Colorado" (DOE/UMT/0103), which is available for public inspection at the locations listed at the end of this notice.

In order to proceed with the selection of an appropriate remedial action, the DOE will prepare an EIS that will analyze the effects of the proposed action and alternatives. After the completion of a final EIS based on the draft EIS and comments on the draft EIS, the plan for remedial action on the Durango tailings will be selected, probably in 1982. The remedial action could then begin in 1983 and be completed during 1987, subject to the appropriation of sufficient funds by the Congress and by the State of Colorado to cover the remedial action costs.

PRELIMINARY IDENTIFICATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: Those issues to be analyzed during the preparation of the EIS will include

1. Exposures to radiation that the public and the workers on the project will receive from routine operations.
2. Exposures to radiation from hypothetical accidents that release radioactive material.
3. Changes in air quality caused by dust and other pollutants.
4. Effects on soils and mineral resources.
5. Effects on surface and ground waters.
6. Effects on plants and animals.
7. Changes in land use.
8. Changes in noise levels during the actions.
9. Effects on scenic, historic, and cultural resources.

10. Changes in population and effects on housing, social structure, services, and economic structure in the communities near the affected places.
11. Effects on transportation networks, including changes in traffic patterns and volumes.
12. Expected use of energy and other resources.
13. Effects of accidents other than effects arising from releases of radioactive material.
14. Benefits of reprocessing the tailings to recover minerals.

The list is not intended to be all-inclusive nor to be a predetermination of impacts.

Analyses of the listed effects will be made for the mill-tailings site, the disposal sites, the reprocessing sites if any, the transportation routes, and the sites where cover material is obtained. The analyses, made for all the alternative actions, will cover both the time when the remedial action is in progress and the time after it has been completed.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITION OF ALTERNATIVES: The DOE will consider all reasonable alternatives to the proposed action and their environmental impacts. The alternative actions presently proposed for analysis in the draft EIS are briefly listed below. This list may be longer or shorter in the draft EIS itself.

1. No action. Under this alternative, the tailings piles would be left in place; no measures would be taken to control them.
2. Stabilization of the tailings piles at their present site. Under this alternative the tailings may be recontoured but would not be moved. Instead they would remain at the former Vanadium Corporation of America site after treatment to ensure that the pile meets the EPA standards for permanent disposal.
3. Removing the tailings and disposing of them permanently below the ground in Bodo Canyon, an area south-southwest of the tailings and about 2.5 road miles from them. There are two options under this alternative. Under option 1 the tailings would be reprocessed by heap leaching at the disposal site to allow the recovery of minerals. Under option 2 the tailings would receive no reprocessing before final disposal.
4. Removing the tailings and disposing of them permanently below the ground in Pine Ridge, an area southwest of the tailings and about 5 road miles from them. Similiar to alternative 2, alternative 3 will have the same two options and will use a similar method of analysis.
5. Removing the tailings and disposing of them permanently below the ground in Long Hollow, an area southwest of the tailings and about 7 road miles from them. This alternative has the same two options as alternative 2, and its methods of analysis will be similar.

COMMENTS AND SCOPING MEETING: The DOE invites all interested parties to submit written comments or suggestions on the draft EIS and to attend the scoping meeting. The purposes of the meeting and of the request for written comments are to provide the DOE and the NRC with as much information from as many viewpoints as possible and to provide interested persons with opportunities to express their views. The DOE will then determine, in consultation with the NRC, the scope of the issues to be addressed in the draft EIS and will identify the significant issues related to the remedial action.

The public scoping meeting will be held in Durango, Colorado, on June 29, 1981. The time and place will be announced in local news publications; they may also be obtained from R. H. Campbell at the address given above.

Persons desiring to make oral comments at the meeting should mail their requests to R. H. Campbell at the above address and should write "Durango scoping meeting" on the envelope. They should notify the DOE of their desire to speak before June 17, 1981, so that the DOE may arrange a schedule for the presentations.

The DOE will establish procedures governing the conduct of the meeting. The meeting will not be conducted as an evidentiary hearing, and those who choose to make statements may not be cross-examined by other speakers. To ensure that everyone who wishes to speak has a chance to do so, five minutes will be allotted to each speaker. Depending on the number of persons requesting to be heard, the DOE may allow longer times for representatives of organizations; persons wishing to speak on behalf of an organization should identify the

organization in their request. Persons who have not submitted a request to speak in advance may register to speak at the scoping meeting; they will be called on to present their comments if time permits.

Written comments and suggestions for issues to be addressed in the draft EIS should be sent to R. H. Campbell at the address given above by July 13, 1981. Written comments will be considered and given equal weight with oral comments in the preparation of the EIS.

On the completion of the draft EIS, notice of its availability will be announced in the Federal Register, and the Department of Energy will again solicit comments. Persons who do not desire to submit comments or suggestions during the scoping period may wish to receive a copy of the draft EIS for review and comment when it is issued; they should notify R. H. Campbell at the above address. Persons seeking further information may inquire at either of the addresses given above.

A transcript of the scoping meeting will be prepared by the DOE and made available at the Freedom of Information Reading Room, Room 1E-190, Forrestal Building, 1000 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20585, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. In addition, members of the public may inspect the transcript of the scoping meeting and other documents now planned for use in preparing the draft EIS at the following locations:

Freedom of Information Reading Room
Room 1E-190, Forrestal Building
U. S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20585

Durango Public Library
1188 Second Avenue
Durango, Colorado 81301

Albuquerque Operations Office
National Atomic Museum
Kirtland Air Force Base East
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87115

Chicago Operations Office
9800 South Cass Avenue
Argonne, Illinois 60639

Idaho Operations Office
550 Second Street
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401

Nevada Operations Office
2753 South Highland Drive
Las Vegas, Nevada 89114

Oak Ridge Operations Office
Federal Building
Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37830

Richland Operations Office
Federal Building
Richland, Washington 99352

Energy Information Center
215 Fremont Street
San Francisco, California 94105

Savannah River Operations Office
Savannah River Plant
Aiken, South Carolina 29801

Regional Energy/Environment Information Center
Denver Public Library
1357 Broadway
Denver, Colorado 80210

Dated at Washington, D.C., this 15th day of May 1981.

For the United States Department of Energy.

Acting Assistant Secretary for
Environmental Protection,
Safety, and Emergency Preparedness