

MR. BEVILL: What is the chief regulatory concern regarding oversight of enrichment facilities and are their hazards similar to commercial nuclear power plants?

CHAIRMAN CARR:

In its regulatory oversight of commercial uranium enrichment plants the NRC will focus on several areas -- worker and public health and safety, environmental protection, safeguarding nuclear material, and security of classified information. The primary regulatory concern related to health, safety, and environmental protection is the prevention of accidental releases of uranium hexafluoride. For safeguards the primary concern is prevention of unauthorized enrichments or diversion of materials, and for security it is prevention of the disclosure of classified information to unauthorized persons.

The hazards of uranium enrichment plants are not similar to those of commercial nuclear power plants which have large inventories of many fission and activation product radionuclides and the stored energy for dispersing them. The principal hazard of an enrichment plant is hydrogen fluoride, which is formed from the reaction of uranium hexafluoride with moisture in air. Uranyl fluoride, which is also formed from this reaction, is slightly radioactive and also presents a modest chemical toxicity hazard.