



UNITED STATES

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

REGION IV

URANIUM RECOVERY FIELD OFFICE
BOX 25325
DENVER, COLORADO 80225

NOV 18 1993

SIS 44

Greg Wingard
9720 - 1st NW
Seattle, WA 98117

Dear Mr. Wingard:

This is in response to your recent letter to Mr. Joe Callan, Director, Division of Radiation Safety and Safeguards, concerning the decommissioning and reclamation of the Atlas Uranium Mill located near Moab, Utah. You expressed your concerns pertaining to the location of the tailings pile in relation to the Colorado River and the town of Moab. You also expressed concern over potential impacts on wetlands, ground water, human health, and about the release of radon gas. We appreciate your comments and will consider them during our continuing evaluation of the reclamation plan for the Atlas mill site.

You may be aware that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) had previously approved site reclamation based on an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) published in 1979. This EIS was documented as NUREG-0453, "Environmental Statement related to the operation of Moab Uranium Mill," January 1979, Docket No. 40-3453. A copy of this document may be obtained from the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, Virginia, 22161. For your convenience, we have enclosed a copy of the Summary and Index of this document. In 1993, the NRC proposed to amend the license of Atlas to approve a revised tailings pile cover design. This intent was noticed in the Federal Register on July 20, 1993. A copy of the Notice of Intent to amend the license has also been enclosed for your information, along with the supporting technical evaluation and Environmental Assessment. A large number of comments were received as a result of this notice. Based on the number and scope of the comments received, the NRC elected to perform a complete reevaluation of the reclamation plan, including the issue of reclamation of the tailings in their current location, and on October 8, 1993, published a withdrawal of the previously noticed intent to amend the Atlas license, and withdrew its Finding of No Significant Impact. Reevaluation of the reclamation plan is currently in progress, and many of those who submitted comments have been included in the reevaluation process. The questions you have raised in your letter have been included in those to be addressed during this reevaluation.

Your letter indicated that the tailings impoundment appears to be unlined without water or any other barrier on top of the pond to reduce the release of radon gas. Although it may not be apparent, as the pond atop the tailings has evaporated, an interim cover has been progressively placed on the exposed tailings. Our experience at other sites, as well as at Atlas, is that the

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interim cover is a very effective barrier in reducing the release of radon gas. Continuous air monitoring has proven the adequacy of the interim cover on the Atlas impoundment.

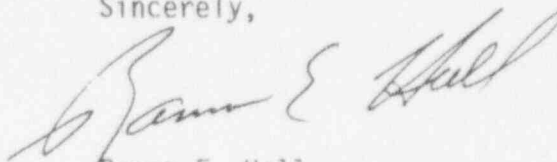
You also made a comment about postings on the fence around the mill. In a recent inspection conducted of the facility the Radiation Control Coordinator reported that many of the radiation signs he places on the fence are removed by members of the public for souvenirs. He checks the fence regularly and replaces signs which have been removed. These signs contain the international radiation symbol, and the words "CAUTION-RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS." No problems have been reported with members of the public trespassing because they do not understand the significance of the posted signs. Environmental monitoring stations located adjacent to the facility continue to indicate that direct radiation is essentially at background values at the facility fence line.

Your comment regarding seepage of fluids from the tailings pile into the ground, and thence to the Colorado River, was addressed in the 1979 EIS. Since regulations became applicable in 1986, an active ground water corrective action program has been in effect under a condition of the Atlas license. This program has reduced, but not eliminated, seepage into the Colorado River. Seepage will continue at an ever decreasing rate until the tailings pile is reclaimed and dry. Monitoring of the ground water and surface water indicate that water quality is improving due to the decreasing seepage rate resulting from the corrective action program. Monitoring of the river water has never revealed a degradation of the river water quality as a result of the seepage from the Atlas tailings pile, even at higher seepage rates present during facility operation when the pile was covered with a pond of fluids from the mill.

In addition to requesting a copy of the previously published Environmental Impact Statement, you also requested the air, surface water, and ground-water monitoring data, along with compliance record of the tailings pond and notices of violation for the site. These documents would be available under the Freedom Of Information Act. You should address your request to the Chief, Freedom Of Information Branch, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C., 20555. Because of the potential volume of requested information, it is suggested that you be more specific in your request to control your potential costs. As an alternative, I suggest that you visit our document reading room in Lakewood, Co., or alternatively the Public Document Room in Washington, D.C., which contains the information you requested. Our document reading room is open during normal business hours Monday through Friday.

If you have any further questions concerning Atlas, please feel free to contact me at (303) 231-5800.

Sincerely,



Ramon E. Hall
Director

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Enclosures:

1. Summary of 1979 EIS
2. FR Notice & Supporting Documents

cc: w/o enclosures

William J. Sinclair, Utah DEQ

Richard Blubaugh, Atlas

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bcc: w/o enclosures
 D. D. Chamberlain, DRSS, RIV
 J. T. Greeves, LLWMD, (5 E2)
 J. J. Holonich, LLUR, (5 E2)
 R. E. Hall, URFO
 C. A. Hackney, RIV
 C. A. Dube, RIV
 R. Wise, RIV
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Coordinated with LLWMD & RIV
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