



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION VIII

999 18th STREET - SUITE 500
DENVER, COLORADO 80202-2466

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Secretary, U.S. Nuclear
Regulatory Commission
ATTN: Docketing and Services Branch
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Madame/Sir:

Pursuant to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's published notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the decommissioning and reclamation of the Atlas Corporation's (Atlas) uranium mill facility at Moab, Utah, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency does have comments on the necessary scope of the EIS.

EPA commends the NRC on the decision to rescind the FONSI, noticed in 1993, and in proceeding with the EIS process to evaluate the reasonable disposal options for the uranium mill tailings located on the Atlas mill site. As stated in our letter of September 2, 1993, to Mr. David Meyer, Chief, Rules Review and Directives Branch, new information and concerns expressed with the 1982 on-site reclamation decision do necessitate review, updating, and re-evaluation. In particular, the several disposal/reclamation options require re-evaluation to insure all pertinent cost factors are included as well as cost updating. The major components of the EIS which EPA considers to be essential to disposal options evaluation and selection of a preferred option are listed below.

1. The potential suitability of the on-site disposal option and each off-site disposal alternate should be determined in accordance with achieving compliance with EPA's remedial standards for longevity against loss due to erosive forces, radon gas emission control, and groundwater protection. One purpose of this comparative evaluation process would be the determination of whether any disposal option has a decidedly lower risk of stabilization failure over the long-term.

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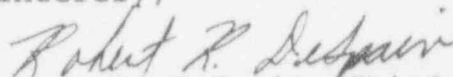


2. The total cost (design, construction, and long-term surveillance) of each disposal option should be reviewed and updated. This probably will involve more than adjusting earlier cost estimates for currency inflation. For example, the total cost of the on-site disposal option should include the cost of groundwater restoration, any required installation of off-site groundwater monitoring wells, and long-term environmental surveillance. Additionally, addressing the expressed concerns of residents/officials from Castle Valley over cover materials haulage may be a source of increased cost for the on-site disposal option if materials source locations must be changed with resultant increased haulage distances (in comparison to earlier evaluations).
3. The extent and magnitude of existing groundwater contamination in the environs of the mill site, including the areal extent of a resultant contamination mixing zone in the Colorado River, should be described in the EIS. Correspondingly, groundwater restoration procedures to remediate this situation should be presented; including the findings of any pilot program conducted to date. If there is a probable compliance need to supplement groundwater restoration procedures with Alternate Concentration Limits (ACL's), the estimated magnitude of the specific ACL's should be included in the EIS.
4. EPA disagrees with the intent of NRC to omit from the EIS any discussion of river biota impacts linked to Colorado River water quality degradation attributable to groundwater contamination. The potential for such adverse impacts must be discussed in the EIS irrespective of any conclusion in earlier evaluations. The EIS should be the vehicle for documenting existing water quality and biological monitoring data to support NRC's conclusion of no adverse impacts on stream biota. Considering the large dilution capacity of the Colorado River, the lack of adverse impacts on stream biota appears to be a reasonable conclusion. However, water quality and biological data are required to verify the lack of significant impact not only at downstream locations of complete mixing, but also close-in locations such as the mixing zone.

5. For the case of on-site disposal, the predicted level and duration of Colorado River water quality degradation, if any, should be evaluated for major flood events.
6. On a "criterion-by criterion" basis, the compliance/acceptability of each disposal option with the requirements of 10 CFR Part 40, Appendix A, should be documented in the EIS. This is particularly important in the case of the on-site disposal option preferred by NRC.

Please contact either Weston Wilson at (303) 293-1439 or Milton Lammering at (303) 293-1440 if we can further explain our recommendations on the scope of the Atlas EIS.

Sincerely,



Robert R. DeSpain, Chief
Environmental Assessment Branch