

UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSIONSAXTON NUCLEAR EXPERIMENTAL CORPORATIONGPU NUCLEAR, INC.SAXTON NUCLEAR EXPERIMENTAL FACILITYDOCKET NO. 50-146NOTICE OF ISSUANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ANDFINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (the Commission) is considering the issuance of a license amendment to the Saxton Nuclear Experimental Corporation (SNEC) and GPU Nuclear, Inc. (the licensees) that would allow decommissioning of the Saxton Nuclear Experimental Facility (SNEF) located near Saxton, Pennsylvania.

Description of Proposed Action

The proposed action is immediate dismantlement (the DECON alternative) of the SNEF. The licensees have requested an amendment to Amended Facility License No. DPR-4 that would allow decommissioning of the SNEF by changing the license and technical specifications to (1) accommodate decommissioning activities at the SNEF, (2) establish specific technical specification controls over decommissioning activities, (3) establish limiting conditions for performing decommissioning activities, (4) extend exclusion area controls to include the SNEF Decommissioning Support Facility, (5) establish requirements for a Radiological Environmental Monitoring Program and an Off-Site Dose Calculation Manual, and (6) establish requirements for Technical and Independent Safety Reviews.

Bu' in 1960-62 under a license to SNEC, the facility was operated from 1962 to 1972 primarily for research and training. In 1972, the SNEF was shut down and placed in a condition equivalent to what is now defined by the NRC as "SAFSTOR" (safe storage) and its operating license was changed to possession-only status. In 1972, all fuel, the control rod blades, and the superheated steam test loop were removed from the SNEF containment vessel (CV) and returned to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission at its Savannah River Plant in South Carolina. After the fuel was removed, equipment, most tanks, and piping external to the CV were also removed. Buildings and structures that supported reactor operations were partially decontaminated in 1972-74. Final decontamination of reactor support structures and buildings was done in 1987-89. This process included decontamination of the Control and Auxiliary Building, Radioactive Waste Disposal Facility, Yard Pipe Tunnel, and Filled Drum Storage Bunker, as well as removal of the Refueling Water Storage Tank. After acceptance of the final release survey by the NRC, these buildings were demolished in 1992. The Saxton Soil Remediation Project was completed in November 1994 which removed and shipped to a licensed radioactive waste disposal facility soil that was located within the site perimeter and found to be contaminated with radioactive material.

In preparation for release of the site for unrestricted use, the licensees now propose to decontaminate and dismantle the SNEF CV; the concrete shield wall located around the northwest and northeast quadrants of the CV; the tunnel sections that are immediately adjacent to the outer circumference of the CV; and remaining portions of the septic system, weirs, and associated underground piping. These structures contain known or suspected residual radioactive material.

Summary of the Environmental Assessment

The purpose of decommissioning a nuclear facility is to remove the facility safely from service, and to reduce residual radioactivity at the site to levels that permit the license granted by the NRC to be terminated.

The NRC staff has reviewed the licensees' application and the SNEC Decommissioning Environmental Report prepared in accordance with 10 CFR 51.53(d). The staff also referred to the SNEC Facility Updated Safety Analysis Report, Revisions 0, 1, and 2 and the SNEC Facility Decommissioning Quality Assurance Plan. To document its review, the staff has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) which examined decommissioning alternatives, non-radiological and radiological impacts of decommissioning, and effects of postulated radiological accidents during decommissioning. The alternatives available for decommissioning—DECON, ENTOMB, SAFSTOR, and no action—are evaluated and discussed in the "Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement on Decommissioning of Nuclear Facilities," NUREG-0586, dated August 1988 (GEIS). Based on its review of the licensees' application and plans for decommissioning described in the Post Shutdown Decommissioning Activities Report (PSDAR), the staff has determined that the environmental impacts, both radiological and nonradiological, associated with the decommissioning of the SNEF, are bounded by the impacts evaluated by the GEIS and have been adequately evaluated by the licensees. The staff also finds that the proposed decommissioning of the SNEF complies with 10 CFR Part 50, Appendix I, and 10 CFR Part 20.

Finding of No Significant Impact

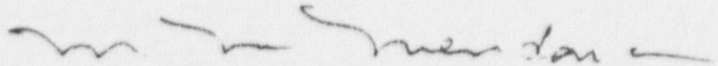
The staff has reviewed the licensees' application for license amendment and environmental report in accordance with the requirements of 10 CFR Part 51. Based upon the EA, the staff concluded that there are no significant environmental impacts associated with the proposed action and that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the Commission has determined, pursuant to 10 CFR 51.31, not to prepare an environmental impact statement.

For further details with respect to this action see (1) the application for license amendment dated November 25, 1996, as supplemented on May 30, June 4 and 16, August 21 and September 16, 1997, and February 3 and 9, 1998, (2) the SNEC Decommissioning Environmental Report submitted on April 17, 1996, and the licensees' response to Commission questions about the environmental report dated July 18, 1996, and March 3 and 31, 1998, (3) the SNEC Facility Updated Safety Analysis Report, Revision 0, submitted on October 25, 1996, Revision 1, submitted on August 21, 1997, and Revision 2, submitted on February 3, 1998, (4) the SNEC Facility Decommissioning Quality Assurance Plan submitted by letter dated November 8, 1996, as supplemented on May 30, 1997, and February 3 and 9, 1998, (5) the PSDAR (originally submitted as the SNEF Decommissioning Plan) dated February 1996, which was submitted on February 16, 1996, as supplemented on July 18, 1996, and (6) the EA dated March 1998. These documents are available for public inspection at the NRC Public Document Room, the Gelman Building, 2120 L Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20003, and at the Local Public Document Room for the SNEF at the Saxton Community Library, Front Street, Saxton,

Pennsylvania 16678. Single copies of the EA may be obtained from Alexander Adams Jr., Senior Project Manager, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, M.S. O-11-B-20, Washington, D.C. 20555.

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 9th day of April 1998.

FOR THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION



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