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NRC ISSUES FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
ON PROPOSED LOUISIANA ENERGY SERVICES PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a final environmental impact statement on the proposal by Louisiana Energy Services to construct and operate a uranium enrichment facility in Claiborne Parish, Louisiana. The site is near Homer and about 50 miles northeast of Shreveport.

The Claiborne Parish plant would be the first privately owned enrichment plant in the United States. Currently the U.S. Enrichment Corporation, a government-owned entity, is the only organization in this country that enriches uranium.

The proposed facility would use a gaseous centrifuge process, with natural uranium hexafluoride as the feed material. The plant would produce about 1000 tons per year of uranium hexafluoride enriched up to five percent in the isotope uranium-235.

The enriched uranium would be used to produce fuel for commercial nuclear power plants in the United States. Louisiana Energy Services estimates that the facility capacity represents about 17 percent of the projected U.S. requirement for enrichment services in the year 2000.

The plant would be constructed in three phases over six years. Facility operation would begin after completion of the first phase and continue for 30 years. Decontamination and decommissioning is projected to take up to seven years after the plant permanently shuts down.

Included in the final environmental impact statement are an assessment of the impact of construction, normal operations, potential accidents and the eventual decontamination and decommissioning of the site. The statement concludes that the facility can be constructed and operated with small but acceptable impact on the public and environment, justified by socioeconomic benefits if the facility is built.

The NRC received more than 530 letters concerning the Draft Environmental Impact Statement that was released last November.

More than 170 letters were received from Louisiana; the remainder were from across the United States and Canada. More than 100 of the letters requested an extension of the comment period or a copy of the document. In response, the NRC agreed to a 15-day extension and provided copies as requested.

Approximately 260 letters, more than 100 of which were from Louisiana, expressed general support for the facility. About 50 of the letters clearly expressed opposition to the facility; 20 of these were from Louisiana. More than 110 of the letters expressed concern over impact to the nearby, predominantly African-American communities of Forest Grove and Center Springs. Other major issues raised were environmental justice, the need for the facility, waste disposal, depleted uranium tails disposition, crime and alternatives. The environmental impact document discusses all these matters.

Publication of the Final Environmental Impact Statement is the next step in the ongoing NRC process to evaluate Louisiana Energy Service's application for a license to construct and operate the facility. An NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board is conducting a hearing on the application. Participants include Citizens Against Nuclear Trash (a group that has been admitted as an intervenor in the proceeding), Louisiana Energy Services and the NRC staff. The Board held the safety phase of the hearing last month in Shreveport. The environmental phase of the hearing will likely begin in January.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement is available for public inspection and copying at the NRC Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, NW, Washington, DC, and at the NRC Local Public Document Room, Claiborne Parish Library, 901 Edgewood Drive, Homer, Louisiana. The document has been assigned the identification number "NUREG-1484." Copies may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9828, or from the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, VA 22161.

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