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Region III Office of Public Affairs
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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$55,000 FINE AGAINST U. S. ENRICHMENT CORP.
FOR FAILING TO DECLARE "ALERT" DURING PORTSMOUTH PLANT FIRE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$55,000 fine against the United States Enrichment Corporation for failing to declare an "alert" under its emergency plan during a fire December 9 of last year at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant at Piketon, Ohio.

The fire damaged equipment in the portion of the plant used to remove waste gases from the processing system. The plant processes uranium for use in fuel for commercial nuclear power plants.

In notifying the company of the proposed fine, NRC Regional Administrator James E. Dyer stated: "The failure to declare an alert during this event resulted in not activating the onsite emergency operations facility which would have provided technical and management support to the onsite response efforts." As a result, plant personnel took longer to fight the fire and did not take prompt action to control any uranium still in the system after the fire was extinguished.

Mr. Dyer added, "Failure to declare an alert also resulting in not notifying local, state and Federal agencies of the event or its significance, so that they could fulfill their emergency response functions."

The fire lasted for about two hours with thick smoke, 20-foot flames, and large quantities of oil spilled onto the floor of the building. Four individuals received minor injuries. The fire was contained in one portion of the large processing building. Environmental monitoring by the company showed no evidence of the release of uranium outside the building.

The company took prompt and comprehensive corrective actions following the fire, including revision of emergency procedures and additional training for the plant staff.

The company has until July 29 to pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the company may request a hearing.

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