



NRC NEWS

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NRC ISSUES FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL, SAFETY REPORTS FOR PROPOSED ENRICHMENT PLANT IN NEW MEXICO

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has published its final Environmental Impact Statement and Safety Evaluation Report for the proposed gas centrifuge uranium enrichment plant to be built in Lea County, N.M. The reports conclude that environmental impacts would be small to moderate and can be mitigated, and that the application meets the agency's health and safety requirements.

Louisiana Energy Services (LES) submitted its license application for the facility, to be called the National Enrichment Facility, on Dec. 12, 2003. The facility would enrich uranium for use in fuel for commercial nuclear power reactors by increasing the proportion of the U-235 isotope to as high as 5 percent by weight.

The environmental and safety reports are the major NRC staff reviews in the licensing process. Several contentions are still before the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, the NRC's independent adjudicatory body, and the Commission expects to complete the licensing review process in mid-2006.

The NRC conducted two public meetings in Lea County to discuss the environmental study: on March 4, 2004, to discuss the scope of the review, and Oct. 14, 2004, to discuss the draft report's findings.

The Environmental Impact Statement concludes that impacts from construction, operation and decommissioning of the plant would be small to moderate and can be mitigated. It further concludes there are no impacts that would preclude licensing the proposed project. The report analyzed costs and benefits of the action and alternative approaches (including the impacts of not building the facility). Also discussed are LES' alternatives for waste management and the proposed facility's likely impacts on land use, historical and cultural resources, air quality, geology, water resources, environmental justice, the local economy, transportation, and public health and safety.

The Safety Evaluation Report discusses the results of the NRC's safety review in the following areas: radiation protection, nuclear criticality safety, chemical process safety, fire safety, emergency management, environmental protection, decommissioning, management measures, materials control and accountability and physical protection.

The NRC is planning to conduct a public meeting in Lea County this summer to provide an overview of the staff's safety review and to address any public comments or questions relating to the Safety Evaluation Report. Details of the meeting will be announced separately.

The Environmental Impact Statement and the Safety Evaluation Report are available electronically on the NRC's Web site through this page:

<http://www.nrc.gov/materials/fuel-cycle-fac/lesfacility.html> .

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