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November 12, 1999

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Energy Department Releases Study of Alternatives For Siting of Plutonium Disposition Facilities

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) this week released to the public the "Surplus Plutonium Disposition Final Environmental Impact Statement" that analyzes the potential impacts of alternatives for the disposition of up to 50 metric tons of plutonium surplus to the United States' defense needs. The document also identifies the Department's Savannah River Site in Aiken, S.C., as the preferred location for building three key plutonium disposition facilities.

"Completion of this environmental review is an important step in assuring the safe and secure disposition of U.S. and Russian surplus plutonium," said Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson. "The U.S. and Russia are close to reaching an agreement to put our surplus plutonium into forms which can never be used for nuclear weapons."

The Department's strategy for disposing of surplus plutonium involves two methods: approximately 17 metric tons will be immobilized in ceramic material surrounded by vitrified high-level waste and up to 33 metric tons will be irradiated as mixed oxide (MOX) fuel in existing domestic, commercial reactors. Three specialized facilities are required to implement this strategy: (1) Pit Disassembly and Conversion Facility to disassemble plutonium pits and convert the resulting metal to an oxide powder; (2) MOX Fuel Fabrication Facility to fabricate plutonium oxide into mixed oxide fuel; and (3) Immobilization Facility to immobilize plutonium oxide with ceramic material. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzes the potential impacts of siting, constructing, operating and ultimately decommissioning these facilities.

Implementation of the MOX approach requires the fabrication of prototype MOX fuel test assemblies prior to the start of operations of the MOX fuel fabrication facility. These assemblies will be used to validate the performance of MOX fuel in commercial reactors. The EIS identifies the Department of Energy's Los Alamos

National Laboratory in New Mexico, as the preferred site for the fabrication of the prototype assemblies and the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, as the preferred site for the post-irradiation examination of the prototype assemblies.

The Department issued the draft Surplus Plutonium Disposition EIS for public comment in June 1998. A supplement to the draft EIS, which analyzed the potential impacts of using MOX fuel in six reactors at three sites in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, was issued in May 1999.

The Department plans to issue a [Record of Decision](#) on the action proposed in the EIS no sooner than 30 days after the availability of the document is announced by the Environmental Protection Agency in the Federal Register.

The final EIS consists of a Summary document and three volumes: Volume I - Main Text (approximately 800 pages); Volume II-Appendices; and Volume III-Responses to Comments. Copies can be requested by calling 1-800/820-5156; by mail addressed to the U.S. Department of Energy, P.O. Box 23786, Washington, D.C. 20026-3786; or via the Internet at <http://www.nnsa.doe.gov/na-26/>. The final EIS and its summary may also be viewed on this web site.

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R-99-303

Updated: 11/15/99