

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Office of Public Affairs  
Washington, DC 20555  
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234  
Internet: opa@nrc.gov

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NRC ISSUES INITIAL CERTIFICATION DECISION  
FOR URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has issued its initial certification decision to the U.S. Enrichment Corporation (USEC) for uranium enrichment plants located near Paducah, Kentucky, and Piketon, Ohio.

USEC, or certain persons whose interest may be affected, may file a petition requesting Commission review of the initial decision to issue a certificate. This petition must be filed within 15 days after a notice of the preliminary decision is published in the Federal Register (expected about September 19).

If no petitions are received, the Director, NRC Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, will sign and issue the certificates. If challenging petitions are received, the Commission will review them and determine what action to take.

The two enrichment plants are owned, and were formerly operated, by the Department of Energy. USEC now operates them under a lease from DOE. The plants use a gaseous diffusion process to enrich uranium hexafluoride gas in the uranium-235 isotope, so that the material can be used as nuclear fuel in civilian nuclear power plants.

The Energy Policy Act of 1992, which established USEC, also required the NRC to establish a certification process and standards for the plants. NRC is to certify the facilities periodically for compliance with the standards, which include procedural, radiological health, safety, safeguards, and security requirements. This is the initial certification.

NRC has reviewed USEC's application for certification and additional information submitted, in response to NRC questions, as well as public comments received. It concluded that there is reasonable assurance that continued operation of the plants will not constitute an undue risk to public health and safety, the environment, and the common defense and security, and that the application meets NRC requirements.

After a transition period following issuance of the

certificates, regulatory authority over plant operations would be transferred from DOE to the NRC on March 3, 1997, unless the Commission directs otherwise after reviewing any petitions filed. The certificates will be effective until December 31, 1998. USEC must apply for certificate renewal by April 15, 1998.

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