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NRC CONSIDERS CONSTRUCTION APPLICATION, ANNOUNCES OPPORTUNITY FOR HEARING ON PROPOSED MIXED OXIDE FUEL FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering an application for construction of a mixed oxide (MOX) fuel fabrication facility at the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site near Aiken, South Carolina.

The agency will offer an opportunity for a hearing to persons whose interests may be affected by this facility.

The Department of Energy announced plans to construct a MOX fuel plant through a contract with the consortium of Duke Engineering & Services, COGEMA Inc., and Stone & Webster (known as DCS). If NRC grants the license, DCS could build and operate a MOX facility that would convert surplus weapons-grade plutonium, supplied by the Department of Energy, into fuel for use in commercial nuclear reactors. Such use would render the plutonium essentially inaccessible and unattractive for weapons use. Commercial nuclear power plants in the United States currently use uranium as fuel; the mixed oxide fuel would be a combination of uranium and plutonium.

DCS submitted an environmental report on the MOX facility last December, and requested authorization to construct the facility in February.

Before deciding whether to authorize construction, the NRC will prepare an environmental impact statement and will conduct a technical evaluation of the application to determine whether it meets NRC requirements.

NRC will publish soon in the Federal Register a notice of opportunity for a hearing on the construction of the MOX facility. The notice will include procedures that should be followed by persons who wish to file a petition with the NRC for a hearing or a petition to participate as a party in the hearing, if one is held. The notice will also specify the date by which petitions must be filed.

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