



NRC NEWS

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NRC ISSUES FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT ON URANIUM RECOVERY OPERATIONS, ANNOUNCES CHANGE IN REVIEW APPROACH

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has published its final Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) for in situ leach uranium recovery (ISR) operations in the Western United States, and is announcing a change in the agency's approach for environmental reviews of new ISR facilities.

The agency has decided to issue full Supplemental Environmental Impact Statements (SEIS) for new recovery operations, instead of Environmental Assessments as originally planned. Under the National Environmental Policy Act, an Environmental Impact Statement is the most thorough review of potential impacts of a proposed licensing action on the environment. It involves extensive opportunities for public participation, with a draft report issued for public comment before a final report is prepared.

"This new approach responds to public concerns that our review of generic impacts common to all uranium recovery actions would overlook unique characteristics of each individual site," NRC Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko said. "Citizens may have confidence in the certainty of our regulatory decisions, because our reviews will be as comprehensive and transparent as possible, with maximum opportunity for the public to participate in the process."

The NRC will continue to prepare Environmental Assessments for applications to expand or renew the licenses of existing uranium recovery operations. An Environmental Assessment typically is not issued for public comment; however, the agency may issue an assessment for comment if a particular application has high public interest. A "finding of no significant impact" ends the environmental review; however, if the assessment does identify significant impacts, the staff would then begin work on a SEIS for the site.

The NRC expects approximately 17 license applications for ISR milling facilities through 2010, including new facilities, expansions and restarts. The GEIS will improve the efficiency of the agency's environmental reviews of these applications by serving as a starting point for site-specific environmental reviews of these applications. The agency expects to complete most licensing reviews within two years, subject to available resources.

The GEIS categorizes as “small,” “moderate” or “large” various impacts of ISR operations on land use, transportation, surface water and groundwater, geology and soils, threatened and endangered species, historical and cultural resources, public health and safety, ecology and air quality. It also examines the socioeconomic impacts and waste management issues of ISR facilities. Many of these impacts are expressed as a range, because the precise impacts can only be determined during the site-specific reviews of each application.

The draft GEIS was published in July 2008. The NRC staff held several public meetings in South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming and New Mexico to discuss the development of the report and to accept public comment on the draft GEIS.

The final “Generic Environmental Impact Statement on In Situ Leach Uranium Milling Facilities,” NUREG-1910, will be available Friday on the NRC Web site at this address: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/sr1910/>.

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NOTE: Anyone wishing to take photos or use a camera to record any portion of a NRC meeting should contact the Office of Public Affairs beforehand.

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