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NRC TO PREPARE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
ON PROPOSED CLEANUP PLAN AT ATLAS URANIUM MILL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has decided that its reevaluation of the proposed reclamation plan for uranium mill tailings at the Atlas Corporation's NRC-licensed uranium mill near Moab, Utah, will include the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

On July 20, 1993, the NRC staff published in the Federal Register a notice of intent to amend the Atlas license to approve changes in the Atlas reclamation plan. The current plan, approved in 1982, provided for onsite disposal of the mill tailings. The staff's proposed approval of the license amendment was based on an NRC Environmental Assessment supporting a Finding Of No Significant Impact regarding the proposed action.

As a result of numerous comments received that opposed the proposed action and identified issues requiring additional evaluation and consideration, the NRC announced on October 8, 1993, its withdrawal of the announced intent to approve the reclamation plan, rescinded its findings, began a technical reevaluation and requested additional information from the licensee.

The NRC indicated that it would reevaluate the technical aspects of the proposed reclamation and the environmental impacts of the proposed option and alternatives, before making a decision on approval of the licensee's revised reclamation plan.

Major technical issues, identified in public comments, that require additional study and analysis include faulting and seismic analysis for the Moab site, and their potential impact on the long-term stability of the tailings; long-term configuration of the Colorado River and its potential to encroach upon the tailings; and concentration limits for groundwater contamination present at the site.

Major environmental analysis issues include the need for a more rigorous comparative cost and impact evaluation of the alternative of stabilization in place, versus relocation and

stabilization at one or more alternative sites. Also to be considered are the potential impact on the Colorado River, if the tailings are stabilized in place, and the visual impact of an onsite stabilized tailings pile, given its close proximity to Arches National Park.

When the NRC issued the October 8 notice of withdrawal of the intention to approve the revised Atlas reclamation plan, the agency planned to prepare a revised Environmental Assessment that would determine whether to issue a proposed finding of no significant impact for the reclamation, or prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement. The agency has now decided to proceed directly to preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, in view of the uncertainties and new issues identified and the controversial nature of the proposed action. Members of the public will be given an opportunity to participate in the scoping process for the Environmental Impact Statement and comment on the draft Environmental Impact Statement to be prepared by the NRC staff.

Atlas prepared its original reclamation plan for the tailings disposal area in 1981, and the NRC approved it in 1982. The plan was revised by Atlas for technical reasons and resubmitted to the NRC on August 2, 1988, with several later revisions--most recently on April 23, 1993.

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