

No. 93-141
Tel. 301/504-2240

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Monday, September 27, 1993)

DOE TO HAVE NRC LICENSE
FOR WYOMING URANIUM MILL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission announced that the Department of Energy now is subject to an NRC license for custody and long-term care of the inactive Spook, Wyoming, uranium mill. Under the terms of the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act and NRC regulations, the license takes effect once NRC agrees that DOE has satisfactorily completed remedial action on a site and developed an acceptable long-term surveillance plan.

This is the first site to be licensed by NRC as a result of an ongoing DOE program to clean up 24 inactive uranium mill tailings processing sites. The tailings at these sites resulted from uranium milling operations by private industries under contract to the Federal government, which bought the uranium for national defense programs during the period from 1943 to 1971. During the latter part of this period there was a reduced demand for uranium, and many uranium mills were closed and abandoned.

The Spook site is located in Converse County, 48 miles northeast of Casper, Wyoming. Once the site of an abandoned open pit mine and uranium mill, it was cleaned up through a cooperative effort of DOE and the Wyoming Abandoned Mine Lands Project. Residual radioactive materials from the milling operations have been encapsulated within the backfilled open pit mine.

The Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act (UMTRCA) was passed by Congress in 1978 in recognition of the potential hazards associated with uranium mill tailings. It authorized DOE to stabilize, dispose of and control uranium mill tailings at inactive uranium mill sites.

UMTRCA gave NRC responsibility for evaluating and concurring in DOE's remedial actions and for licensing the completed disposal sites for long-term care. Under NRC regulations, this license is available only to DOE (or any successor Federal agency designated by the President) and has no termination date.

A disposal site is subject to the NRC general license only after specific actions occur. First, the NRC must concur that remedial action for that site has been completed in accordance with the EPA standards. Second, the NRC must formally accept a site-specific long-term surveillance plan documenting that the land and interests are owned by the United States or an Indian tribe, and describing how the long-term care of the site will be carried out.

The NRC staff has concurred in the completion of surface remedial action at the Spook site and has completed its review of DOE's long-term surveillance plan. By letter dated September 21, 1993, NRC accepted the plan, thereby making the site subject to the general license.

DOE will now begin carrying out the long-term surveillance program, including annual site inspections and reports to the NRC. DOE plans for groundwater remedial action at Spook have been deferred to a separate phase of the project, as allowed under UMTRCA. Amendment of the surface long-term surveillance plan will be made, if necessary, following NRC concurrence in the completion of the groundwater remedial action.

#