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NRC TRANSFERS RESPONSIBILITY FOR
NEW MEXICO URANIUM MILL TAILINGS DISPOSAL SITE TO DOE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has granted the request of Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) to terminate its license for a uranium mill site near Grants, New Mexico, and has placed the site under the custody and long-term care of the Department of Energy, which is now the licensee for the site.

The tailings represent a long-term potential health hazard to public health and safety because they contain radium, which generates radon gas. Therefore the NRC requires that the tailings be stabilized and covered with a clay barrier that prevents release of the gas.

The ARCO mill began operation in 1953 and operated until 1982. During that period, approximately 24 million tons of uranium mill tailings were produced as a byproduct of the uranium milling.

The Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978 requires cleanup of soil contamination, long-term stabilization and control of tailings, and cleanup of groundwater at uranium mill sites. Before terminating the ARCO license, the NRC verified that the Bluewater site had been cleaned up in accordance with applicable standards and that stabilization of the tailings was in accordance with regulations and a previously approved design. The NRC also reviewed DOE's plan for long-term care of the site and concluded that the plan satisfied the requirements of the Act.

The ARCO mill site is the second commercially operated uranium mill to be cleaned up satisfactorily in conformance with NRC requirements. ARCO transferred \$635,165 to DOE to cover the costs of annual inspections to ensure that the site is maintained.

Any person whose interest may be affected by the licensing action may file a request for a hearing. The request should be filed within 30 days after the publication of a Federal Register notice on this subject, which is expected shortly. Procedures for filing the request will be described in the Federal Register notice.

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