



NRC NEWS

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NRC AUTHORIZES OPERATION OF LOUISIANA ENERGY SERVICES NATIONAL ENRICHMENT FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has completed its readiness review of the Louisiana Energy Services gas centrifuge uranium enrichment plant in Lea County, N.M., and concluded that the facility can begin operation of the first cascade under its NRC license. A cascade is a series of rotating cylinders using centrifugal force to separate uranium isotopes.

The LES URENCO USA Facility, located near the town of Eunice, was granted an NRC license in June 2006, and the company began constructing the site's buildings, centrifuges and security structures. The license allows LES to enrich uranium up to five percent of the isotope uranium-235 for use in the manufacture of nuclear fuel for commercial power plants.

LES is a subsidiary of URENCO, a company that has been using centrifuge technology in Europe for more than 30 years.

During the construction of the LES facility, NRC inspectors conducted extensive evaluations to independently assess whether the plant was built in accordance with its design and NRC regulations. Once the construction was completed, further detailed NRC inspections looked at safety systems, training, operating procedures, security and other aspects of safe facility operation before the agency authorized operation of the enrichment facility first cascade.

“Our inspectors have examined not only the construction and testing of systems, but the additional factors, including training and procedures,” said NRC Region II Administrator Luis Reyes. “Even after the first centrifuge is started, we will continue to inspect the operation to ensure the protection of people and the environment in the area.”

The NRC staff will hold a public meeting in the area soon to discuss the decision to authorize operation as well as the continuing NRC oversight and inspection.

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