



NRC accepts comments for draft

Thursday, September 11, 2008 5:43 PM MDT

GRANTS - Members of the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission were in Grants on Tuesday evening accepting their second phase of comments on their Generic Environmental Impact Statement on in-situ leach milling facilities.

In-situ leaching is a process in which local non-potable water groundwater with added oxygen and sodium carbonate or bicarbonate is injected into an underground ore deposit to leach out (or dissolve) uranium, which is then pumped to the surface for additional processing. Currently the process is being used in Texas and Wyoming.

Currently the NRC has received 30 letters of intent for new, renew or restart uranium milling facilities in the Western part of the United States being in Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska and New Mexico. Four of the letters are from New Mexico, according to Larry Camper, the NRC senior official for this project, and all four are for conventional mining. "None are for in-situ at this point," he said.

A press release by the NRC stated by addressing common issues associated with environmental reviews of the milling facilities. The NRC staff will use the GEIS as a starting point for its site-specific environmental analysis of individual license applications or as a supplement to previous environmental analysis of existing sites.

The draft GEIS is available on the NRC website at www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/sr1910/, or a disk is available at the Beacon office for copy.

The second and final comment period for the GEIS draft is through Oct. 7. You can either comment by mail to Chief, Rules Review and Directives Branch, Mailstop T[^]-D59, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington D.C., 20555-0001, or email to NRCEP.Resource@nrc.gov. The NRC asks that you include 'Uranium Recovery GEIS' in the subject line.

The GEIS began with a scoping process one year ago and the final draft is scheduled to be complete by June 2009 and registered into the Federal Register Notice.

The Center for Nuclear Waste Regulate Analysis of Texas was contracted to create the GEIS document with information provided by the NRC members.

Camper said that he thought the meeting went well. "There were many heartfelt comments, obviously it is an important issue here," he said. "We will consider them all.

"The GEIS is not designed to cut corners or streamline the process," he said. "It will still take two years to complete each [uranium milling site] application and each site will be a site-specific environmental review," he emphasized. "Site-specific for different reasons. One is cultural history."

Camper added that what drove the agency to the GEIS is the NRC is currently receiving so many applications and the NRC is obligated to do the environmental assessment study for each site. The GEIS is just a more efficient process, he said.

The NRC does not regulate mining, only milling. The agency regulates in-situ because it is perceived that through the in-situ process the uranium is milled in the ground.

"We are like any other business," Camper said in an exclusive interview, "if you were to receive a flood of new business, wouldn't you look for ways to be more efficient and avoid redundancy? The GEIS is simply more efficient and avoids redundancy. We are still obligated to protect people and the environment."

Approximately 150 people attended the meeting. The comment period last until 10:30 p.m. Camper's final remarks ended at approximately 11 p.m.

Next Tuesday the Beacon will publish comments of those for and against the GEIS. The Bluewater Downstream Alliance, a group that voiced at the meeting that they do not support the GEIS, will be speaking at the monthly Chamber of Commerce luncheon on Wednesday at La Ventana restaurant.

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<http://www.cibolabeacon.com/articles/2008/09/12/news/news3.txt>