



NRC NEWS

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NRC TAKES REGULATORY OVERSIGHT OF USEC LEAD CASCADE, AUTHORIZES PROCESSING OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has assumed regulatory oversight responsibility of USEC Inc.'s American Centrifuge Lead Cascade Facility in Piketon, Ohio, and has authorized USEC to process uranium at the facility.

The transition of regulatory oversight to the NRC from the U.S. Department of Energy was finalized in a letter to USEC signed today by Robert Pierson, director of the NRC's Division of Fuel Cycle Safety and Safeguards, and Larry Clark, director of DOE's Office of Nuclear Fuel Security and Uranium Technology. The transfer becomes effective at 12:01 a.m. on Aug. 25. The NRC-DOE letter implements a memorandum of understanding between the two agencies signed March 24, 2004.

The NRC issued USEC a five-year license for the Lead Cascade centrifuge demonstration facility on Feb. 24, 2004. The Lead Cascade is located at DOE's Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant site in Piketon, and is based on DOE's centrifuge technology for enriching uranium for use in producing fuel for nuclear reactors. The Lead Cascade consists of up to 240 full-scale centrifuges, which will recycle the enriched and depleted uranium; the only withdrawals of uranium from the cascade will be small samples for quality control analysis.

Inspectors from NRC's Region II office in Atlanta conducted an operational readiness review of the Lead Cascade over the past several months. They concluded that USEC has met all conditions spelled out in the NRC license and that the facility has been constructed and will be operated safely and securely according to NRC regulations and the requirements of the license.

The Lead Cascade is separate from the American Centrifuge Plant, a full-scale commercial enrichment plant USEC proposes to construct at the same location. The NRC is currently reviewing USEC's application for the full-scale plant, and expects to issue its Safety Evaluation Report in the coming weeks.

In the attached photograph, Robert Pierson, NRC Director of Fuel Cycle Safety and Safeguards (left) signs the letter transferring regulatory oversight of the Lead Cascade facility to the NRC, while Phil Sewell, Senior Vice President of USEC (center) and Larry Clark, Director of DOE's Office of Nuclear Fuel Security and Uranium Technology (right), look on. Photo by NRC, Aug. 24, 2006.

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