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DOE TO TEST THREE SITES FOR POSSIBLE URANIUM MILL TAILINGS DISPOSAL

Three sites in the Rifle area have been selected by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to undergo a series of data collection efforts to determine their suitability as a potential disposal location for over 3 million tons of uranium mill tailings. The tailings, which presently lie in the flood plain of the Colorado River, were created through the milling of uranium ore at the former Union Carbide processing plant.

The DOE in conjunction with the State of Colorado will be cleaning up the uranium mill tailings under their Uranium Mill Tailings Remedial Action (UMTRA) Project. It has been determined that relocation of the slightly radioactive material might be necessary in order to meet longevity requirements of 200-1000 years for the tailings once they are stabilized.

The three sites under consideration for relocation are at Webster Hill, Hubbard Mesa, and Estes Gulch, all within a six-mile radius of Rifle, Colorado.

Bids for three separate data collection subcontracts have been solicited. Award of these bids is expected within 30 days.

The first bid package calls for drilling 23 groundwater monitoring wells in the vicinity of the existing uranium mill tailings piles. This will allow the DOE to study the quality of any groundwater found in the sandstone bedrock underneath the uranium tailings.

The second package requires geotechnical drilling, coring, and sampling of two holes at two of the three potential disposal sites. Follow-on drilling of as many as 40 additional holes at one of the sites may be required to confirm technical adequacy of the selected site.

The third bid package consists of geophysical logging of the holes which will be drilled as part of the first two bid packages.

Finally, a fourth package calls for the excavation of test pits at the selected site. Test pits are dug to obtain samples which will be analyzed to establish suitability of the soil at the site for use as a possible cover material for the uranium mill tailings. Soils will be tested for their ability to prevent escape of radon gas from the tailings.

The excavation bid package is expected to be advertised towards the end of July for proposed award and completion in September, 1985.

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Details of the work being performed will be discussed at a meeting with the Rifle Uranium Mill Tailings Task Force sometime in early September. Notice of the meeting, which will be open to the public will appear in the local newspapers.

If anyone has questions about the UMTRA Project or the characterization work mentioned above, they are encouraged to contact Ted Anderson, Rifle City Manager, at 625-2121.

The Rifle uranium tailings piles are two of 24 sites nationwide to be cleaned up by DOE. This work is being managed by the DOE's Albuquerque Operations Office through their UMTRA Project Office, in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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