



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

No. 07-014

January 30, 2007

NRC ISSUES LICENSE TO RMD OPERATIONS OF COLORADO FOR EXTRACTING URANIUM FROM MUNICIPAL WATER SUPPLIES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a license to RMD Operations, LLC, of Wheat Ridge, Colo., for its system of removing uranium from municipal water supplies to help communities comply with new federal safe drinking water standards.

Water treatment facilities must comply this year with new standards published in 2000 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency limiting the amounts of various contaminants in drinking water. The EPA's limit for uranium, which occurs naturally in groundwater, is 30 micrograms per liter, or 30 parts per billion. Up to 2,000 treatment facilities nationwide must meet this standard.

However, extracting uranium from drinking water could result in these facilities accumulating enough concentrated uranium to require licensing as source material by the NRC or an Agreement State (34 states regulate radioactive materials in their jurisdictions under agreements with the NRC). Any material consisting of more than 0.05 percent uranium is considered source material, and any entity possessing more than 15 pounds at a time, or 150 pounds over the course of a year, must be licensed.

The license granted to RMD allows the company to contract with water treatment facilities in NRC states to remove uranium from their community water supplies and to take possession of the uranium once extracted. The program involves storing the collected uranium in RMD's self-contained uranium removal system for disposal in properly permitted or licensed facilities, either as waste or as an "alternate feed" for a uranium mill.

The RMD uranium water treatment program may enable community water systems to remove uranium from drinking water sources to comply with the EPA requirements without the need to develop expertise in handling radioactive materials. The program may also allow municipal water authorities to remove the uranium permanently from their environments.

As an NRC licensee, RMD will have ownership and/or control of its uranium removal system, its operation, and all licensed materials it contains, including the uranium removed from the treated water.

The NRC license applies to the 16 states under NRC jurisdiction. At RMD's request, the agency sent its environmental assessment to Agreement and non-Agreement States for their review before the license was issued. RMD has applied for similar licenses in some Agreement States.

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