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NRC ISSUES LICENSE TO USEC INC. FOR GAS CENTRIFUGE URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLANT IN OHIO

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a license to USEC Inc. to construct and operate a gas centrifuge uranium enrichment plant at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant reservation near Piketon, Ohio.

The facility, to be known as the American Centrifuge Plant, will use a design based on gas centrifuge technology developed by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to enrich uranium for use in fuel for commercial nuclear power reactors. The license authorizes USEC to enrich uranium up to 10 percent of the fissile isotope uranium-235.

USEC submitted its application for the license Aug. 23, 2004. The NRC staff published an environmental impact statement (NUREG-1834) on the facility in April 2006, finding that there would be no significant adverse environmental impacts that would preclude granting a license. The staff's safety evaluation report (NUREG-1851), published last September, documents the staff's review of the application.

A three-judge Licensing Board of the NRC's independent Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel conducted hearings in March 2007 to consider whether the staff's environmental and safety reviews were adequate. The Licensing Board issued its initial decision today authorizing the staff to issue the license.

The NRC will conduct inspections during construction and operation of the American Centrifuge Plant, with inspectors from agency headquarters in Rockville, Md., and its Region II office in Atlanta, which has national responsibilities for fuel cycle facilities. The agency will hold a public meeting in Pike County in the near future to explain its oversight plans to members of the public.

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