

AGENCY: U.S. Department of Energy

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), DOE/EA-1123, to assess environmental impacts associated with the transfer of normal and low-enriched uranium billets, and activities to support this work at the Hanford Site, Richland, Washington. The billets were fabricated for use in the Hanford Site's nuclear production reactors. The billets are located in the 300 Area of DOE's Hanford Site near the City of Richland, Washington. Alternatives considered in the review process included: the No Action alternative; the preferred alternative to transfer the uranium billets; and alternatives addressing other uses of the billets and modes/methods for transporting the billets in the continental U.S.

Based on the analysis in the EA, and considering comments from Dr. Belsey of the Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, the Maryland Department of the Environment, and the Washington State Patrol, DOE has determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4321, et seq. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

ADDRESSES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Single copies of the EA and further information about the proposed action are available from:

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For further information regarding the DOE NEPA process, contact:

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PURPOSE AND NEED: Under the auspices of an agreement between the U.S. and the United Kingdom, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has an opportunity to transfer approximately 710,000 kilograms (1,562,000 pounds) of normal and low-enriched uranium to the United Kingdom, thus reducing long-term surveillance and maintenance burdens at the Hanford Site. The material, in the form of billets, is controlled by DOE's Defense Programs, and is presently stored as surplus material in the 300 Area of the Hanford Site.

BACKGROUND: Uranium billets were fabricated into fuel for use in the Hanford Site's production reactors. The uranium billets presently stored on the Hanford Site are surplus material because DOE defense reactor operations have been discontinued. The surplus uranium billets are currently stored in wooden shipping containers in secured facilities in the 300 Area of the Hanford Site. The proposed action is similar to that taken in 1992 when uranium billets were transported from the Hanford Site, through Seattle, Washington, to the United Kingdom. No significant environmental impacts were identified as a result of the 1992 campaign.

PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action is to transfer low-enriched and normal uranium billets to the United Kingdom. British Nuclear Fuels, Inc. (BNFL), acting as an agent for the United Kingdom will be responsible for transportation of the billets. The billets would be packaged at the Hanford Site, and transferred to BNFL for transportation to the UK. The current route is overland truck from the Hanford Site to Seattle, Washington; and ocean carrier to the United Kingdom.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED: The EA discussed a variety of alternatives as well as the No-Action Alternative.

No-Action Alternative. This alternative would result in the continued storage of the uranium billets in their current configuration at the Hanford Site. The facilities would be maintained with minimal surveillance as they have been for several years. Although no environmental impacts would be expected as a result of continued storage, this alternative would result in continued surveillance and maintenance costs.

Alternative Uses. At the present time, no domestic uses for these materials have been identified. Previous attempts to market these materials have been unsuccessful.

Alternative U.S. Ports. BNFL currently plans to use Seattle, Washington, as the point of egress from the U.S., although other U.S. ports were considered in the EA. It is expected that any potential environmental impacts of transport through other U.S. ports would be bounded by those analyzed for the 1995 nitric acid shipments from the Hanford Site to the United Kingdom via east coast ports (DOE/EA-1005, Environmental Assessment for the Disposition and Transportation of Surplus Radioactive Low Specific Activity Nitric Acid, Hanford Site, Richland, Washington).

Alternative Continental U.S. Transportation Modes. Rail, air, and barge transportation to Seattle, Washington, were considered. BNFL presently prefers to use truck transport to Seattle, Washington, for transfer to an ocean carrier.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: Routine conduct of the proposed activity would not result in any significant increase in Hanford Site emissions. Before beginning the proposed activity, appropriate procedures and administrative controls would be in place to maintain exposure to workers and other onsite personnel to within requirements established by DOE Orders and as low as reasonably achievable principles. No additional radiation exposure to either onsite personnel or offsite individuals would be expected from the proposed action. The risks to workers from chemical exposures, noxious vapors, burns, and other common industrial hazards are expected to be low, and would be minimized by training and the use of appropriate personal protective equipment.

The 300 Area is a developed, highly disturbed area, and is currently under a vegetation management program which eradicates vegetation. No sensitive or critical plant or animal habitat would be affected. There are no animal species of special concern which are known to use the areas exclusively.

The proposed action would not increase noise levels or release any particulate matter, thermal releases, or gaseous discharges in significant amounts.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Existing Hanford workers will perform the bulk of the packaging and transfer activities. Therefore, no socioeconomic impacts are expected from this action.

Cumulative Impacts

The proposed action is not expected to contribute substantially to the overall cumulative impacts from operations on the Hanford Site. Standard Operating Procedures will provide sufficient personnel protection such that exposure to radiological and chemical materials will be kept below DOE and contractor guidelines. Routine uranium disposition operations will not increase the amount of radioactivity released from total Hanford operations. In 1994, the maximally exposed offsite individual was exposed to 5×10^{-2} millirem (effective dose equivalent) from total air emissions, well below allowable limits set by state and federal regulations. The wastes generated from the activities would not add substantially to waste generation rates at the Hanford Site and would be stored or disposed of in existing facilities.

Environmental Justice

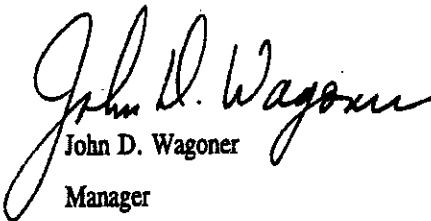
Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, requires that Federal agencies identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and activities on minority and low-income populations. Since no socioeconomic impacts or health effects are expected, it is not expected that there would be any disproportionate adverse effects to low-income or minority populations in the surrounding community.

Impacts From Postulated Accidents

In addition to environmental impacts that were postulated from routine operations, the EA discussed a range of reasonably foreseeable accident scenarios that could lead to environmental impacts. The maximum reasonably foreseeable accident was considered to be one in which a truck or ship collision results in an entire shipment of billets being engulfed in fire. The resulting total dose was conservatively estimated to be 32.1 person-rem, or 0.016 latent cancer fatalities.

DETERMINATION: Based on the analysis in the EA, and considering comments from Dr. Belsey of the Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, the Maryland Department of the Environment, and the Washington State Patrol, I conclude that the proposed Transfer of Normal and Low-Enriched Uranium to the United Kingdom does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, an EIS for the proposed action is not required.

Issued at Richland, Washington, this 9th day of November, 1995.



John D. Wagoner

Manager

Richland Operations Office