DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Revision to the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement on a Proposed Nuclear Weapons Nonproliferation Policy Concerning Foreign Research Reactor Spent Nuclear Fuel

AGENCY: Department of Energy.

ACTION: Revision to Record of Decision.

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE), pursuant to 10 CFR § 1021.315, and in consultation with the Department of State, is revising the Record of Decision issued on May 13, 1996 (61 Fed. Reg. 25092) on the Final Environmental Impact Statement on a Proposed Nuclear Weapons Nonproliferation Policy Concerning Foreign Research Reactor Spent Nuclear Fuel (the Final EIS, DOE/EIS–218F of February 1996), to allow the United States to take title to spent nuclear fuel and target material from foreign research reactors located in countries with other-than-high-income economies, as defined in the Final EIS, at locations other than the port of entry into the United States.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The revision to the Record of Decision is effective July 22, 1996.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information on the DOE program for the management of foreign research reactor spent nuclear fuel or the Record of Decision, contact: Mr. David G. Huizenga, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Material and Facility Stabilization, Office of Environmental Management (EM–60), U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20585, (202) 586-5151. For information on DOE's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, contact: Ms. Carol Borgstrom, Director, Office of NEPA Policy and Assistance (EH–42), U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20585, Telephone (202) 586-4600, or leave a message at 1-800-472-2756.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

DOE, in consultation with the Department of State, issued the Final Environmental Impact Statement on a Proposed Nuclear Weapons Nonproliferation Policy Concerning Foreign Research Reactor Spent Nuclear Fuel (the Final EIS, DOE/EIS–218F) on February 16, 1996. The Record of Decision was issued on May 13, 1996, and was published in the Federal Register on May 17, 1996, (61 Fed. Reg. 25092). In the Final EIS, DOE and the Department of State considered the potential environmental impacts of a proposed policy to manage spent nuclear fuel and target material from foreign research reactors. After consideration of public comments submitted on the Draft EIS, and concerns expressed following issuance of the Final EIS, DOE, in consultation with the Department of State, decided to implement the proposed policy as identified in the Preferred Alternative contained in the Final EIS, subject to additional stipulations specified in Section VII of the Record of Decision.

II. Statement of Purpose

Subsequent to issuance of the Record of Decision on May 13, 1996, DOE, in consultation with the Department of State, determined that the need may arise during implementation of the policy for the United States to take title to spent nuclear fuel and target material from foreign research reactors located in countries with other-than-high-income economies at locations other than the port of entry into the United States. For the reason for the Revision: The point at which title to the spent nuclear fuel and target material transfers from the reactor operator to the United States has no effect on the physical processes that would take place under the acceptance policy, and thus would not have any effect on the potential impacts to the environment, workers, or the public. As a result, DOE, after consultation with the Department of State, concluded that the selection of the title transfer location could be made solely on programmatic considerations. At the time the Record of Decision was issued, DOE had not identified any advantage to the United States of taking title outside the United States. Therefore, the Record of Decision stated that transfer of title would occur when the foreign research reactor spent nuclear fuel and target material actually enters the land mass of the United States because that approach linked the transfer of title to an easily identifiable occurrence.

In the course of diplomatic discussions with Chile, Brazil, and Colombia, these foreign governments raised an important concern related to the location of the title transfer. Specifically, since the Department is seeking to include transportation casks from multiple South American countries on a single ocean-going vessel, a question has arisen regarding who would be liable for any potential damage when spent fuel from one country is in the territory of another during the shipment. Furthermore, DOE has been informed that shipowners
willing to transport spent nuclear fuel from South America without coverage under the Price-Anderson Act have not been identified. The United States Government can assume responsibility for these shipments and extend Price-Anderson Act coverage to the shippers while the material is outside United States territory only if the United States has taken title to the spent nuclear fuel. Therefore, rather than taking title at the point the spent fuel actually enters the land mass of the United States (at the United States port), DOE is herein revising the Record of Decision to allow the title transfer location for spent nuclear fuel or target material from reactors located in countries with other-than-high-income economies to be determined on a case-by-case basis, to be specified in DOE’s individual contracts with the reactor operators. Under such an approach, title could transfer as early as the departure of the loaded cask from the reactor site or at the foreign port-of-origin, or as late as entry into the United States as specified in the May 13, 1996, Record of Decision.

Similar liability concerns are not applicable for reactors in countries with high-income economies because reactor operators in these countries are able to provide sufficient insurance for transporting their own spent nuclear fuel to the United States.

For the reasons set forth above, Section VII ("Decision") of the Record of Decision issued on May 13, 1996, is revised by adding a new Paragraph E to read as follows:

E. In the case of research reactors located in countries with high-income economies, as defined in the Final EIS, the United States will take title to the spent nuclear fuel and target material when it reaches the United States port of entry. In the case of research reactors located in countries with other-than-high-income economies, as defined in the Final EIS, the United States may take title to the spent nuclear fuel and target material at locations other than the port of entry into the United States. On a case-by-case basis, the United States may determine whether it is in its best interests, with regard to the execution of this policy, to take title to certain spent nuclear fuel and target material before it reaches the port of entry into the United States. The title transfer location will be specified in the contract with the affected reactor operator.

In addition, Section IX ("Basis for the Decision"), Paragraph G ("Title Transfer Location") of the Record of Decision is revised to read as follows:

G. Title Transfer Location—The alternative points at which DOE might take title to the spent nuclear fuel and target material are discussed in Sections 2.2.1.4 and 2.2.2.4 of the Final EIS. The point at which title will be transferred has no effect on the physical processes that would take place, and thus will not have any effect on the impacts on the environment, workers, or the public. However, the point of title transfer does affect financial responsibility for risks associated with the shipments.

Under United States law, the Price-Anderson Act would provide indemnification coverage for spent nuclear fuel and target material shipments from foreign research reactors upon entry of the material into the United States regardless of when title is transferred to the United States. However, Price-Anderson coverage outside United States territory is provided only if the material is owned by, and used by, or under contract with the United States. Reactor operators located in countries with high-income economies are able to provide sufficient insurance for transporting their own spent nuclear fuel without Price-Anderson coverage. For countries with other-than-high-income economies, however, DOE has been informed that shippers will not transport spent nuclear fuel without coverage under the Price-Anderson Act have not been identified.

The approach for transfer of title discussed in Section VII.E., ensures that liability for accidents during the transportation process outside the United States will remain with the reactor operators for reactors in countries with high-income economies, while the United States Government will be accountable in the unlikely event of an accident within United States territory. On the other hand, the provision allowing DOE to take title to spent fuel from reactors in countries with other-than-high-income economies will allow DOE to assume financial responsibility for these shipments while outside the United States. This provision will provide a mechanism whereby liability coverage can be provided for segments of the transportation process that the reactor operators are unable to provide themselves to provide.

The revision of the Record of Decision set forth in this Notice complies with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. section 4321 et seq.) and its implementing regulations at 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508 and 10 CFR Part 1021. Because there are no environmental impacts associated with changing the title transfer location, no further environmental review is required under the National Environmental Policy Act or Executive Order 12114 (January 4, 1979) in order to effectuate the revision.

Issued in Washington, D.C., this 22nd day of July, 1996.

Alvin L. Alm,
Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management.

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