

1982 WL 151371 (F.R.)

NOTICES

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

L-Reactor Operation, Savannah River Plant Aiken, South Carolina; Finding
of No Significant Impact

Monday, August 23, 1982

***36691** The Department of Energy (DOE) proposes to resume operation of L- Reactor at its Savannah River Plant at Aiken, South Carolina, as soon as it is ready for operation, scheduled for October 1983. The environmental impacts of the resumption of operation have been evaluated in an environmental assessment (DOE/EA-0195), prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) as implemented by regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, November 1978) and DOE implementing guidelines (45 FR 20694, March 28, 1980). Based on the analysis in the assessment, DOE has determined that the proposed resumption of L-Reactor operation is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, no environmental impact statement is required.

The L-Reactor site is located in the south central portion of the Savannah River Plant. The plant occupies approximately 800 square kilometers adjacent to the Savannah River near Aiken, South Carolina. The plant has been used by the Federal government since 1951 for the production of defense nuclear materials.

L-Reactor began operation in 1954 and was placed in official standby status in 1968. The principal areas of environmental impact during the 1954-1968 operating period were the Steel Creek corridor, which leads from the reactor to the Savannah River and received the cooling water discharge, and the Steel Creek delta area. The Steel Creek corridor and delta are located on the Savannah River Plant site. The resumption of L-Reactor operation is expected to affect essentially the same areas previously affected. The analysis in the environmental assessment shows that foreseeable impacts from resumed operation related to water quality, air quality, solid waste, and radiological dose to the workforce and the public are expected to be somewhat less than those experienced during the 1954-1968 operating period. In all other respects, this analysis demonstrates that the differences in impacts expected to result from resumed operation and the previous operation are negligible. Accordingly, DOE has concluded that, based on the analysis in the environmental assessment, any differences in impacts between the previous operation and those foreseen from the proposed resumption of operation are not significant.

In addition, the analysis in the environmental assessment of foreseeable impacts of the resumption of L-Reactor operation relative to current environmental conditions shows the following impacts. Cooling water withdrawal will use less than 4% of the average annual flow of the Savannah River. Thermal discharge should impact only 3% of the wetlands on the Savannah River Plant site, which were also impacted during previous operation. No critical habitats of endangered or threatened species occur on the Savannah River Plant site and mitigation measures will be employed to minimize impacts to the American alligators in the impacted area. The expected radiation doses to the public from restart due to routine operations are small relative to natural background levels, and the risk from maximum credible accidents is also predicted to be very low.

Therefore, considering the previous impacts in the area due to the operation of L-Reactor from 1954 to 1968, and viewed in the context of the physical setting and current use of the Savannah River Plant site, DOE has found that the impacts resulting from the resumption of L-Reactor operation should not be significant.

Copies of the L-Reactor environmental assessment are available from: Ronald W. Cochran, Director of Nuclear Materials Production, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs, U.S.

Department of Energy, Washington, D.C. 20545, 301-353-2402.

Issue Date: August 20, 1982.

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Assistant Secretary, Environmental Protection, Safety, and Emergency Preparedness.

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