

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Inactive Uranium Mill Tailings Site Near Grand Junction, Colo.; Compliance With the National Environmental Policy Act; Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Conduct Public Scoping Meetings for Remedial Actions**AGENCY:** Energy Department.

AGENCY: Notice is hereby given that the Department of Energy intends to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to assess the environmental implications of remedial actions to be performed on the inactive uranium mill tailings pile and vicinity properties near Grand Junction, Colorado.

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE) announces its intent to prepare an EIS, in accordance with Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to provide environmental input into the selection of an appropriate remedial action in connection with uranium mill tailings and other residual radioactive materials at an inactive uranium mill near Grand Junction, Colorado and at residences, commercial buildings, and open lands in the Grand Junction area which are contaminated with mill tailings derived from the inactive uranium mill. The DOE's proposed action is to perform remedial action pursuant to Pub. L. 95-604, the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978. Such remedial actions consist of those measures taken to stabilize or control the mill tailings to the extent necessary to ensure that the radiological and non-radiological impacts from the mill tailings do not exceed the standards for the protection of the public health, safety, and environment promulgated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EIS will consider the options of remedial action and no remedial action. In addition, the EIS will consider the following remedial action alternatives: stabilization of the tailings in their present location and removal of the tailings to either of three new disposal sites. The DOE is serving as the lead agency for preparation of the EIS; the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) will participate as a cooperating agency. The DOE invites interested agencies, organizations, and members of the general public to submit comments or suggestions for consideration in connection with the preparation of the draft EIS. Comments or suggestions to assist the DOE in identifying significant environmental issues and the appropriate scope of the draft EIS are requested. Comments may be submitted

by mail or presented at scoping meetings to be held in Grand Junction, Colorado, on February 8 & 9, 1983. On completion of the draft EIS, its availability will be announced in the Federal Register and local news media, and comments will be solicited. Comments on the draft EIS will be considered in preparing the final EIS.

ADDRESS: Written comments or suggestions on the scope of the EIS and requests to speak at the scoping meeting may be submitted to Mr. James A. Morley, Uranium Mill Tailings Project Office, Albuquerque Operations Office, Department of Energy, P.O. Box 5400, Albuquerque, NM 87115, (505) 844-3941. Envelopes should be marked "DEIS for Grand Junction tailings pile."

General information on the process followed by the DOE in preparing environmental impact statements may be obtained from Office of Environmental Compliance, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Environmental Protection, Safety, and Emergency Preparedness, U.S. Department of Energy, ATTN: Mr. Steven R. Woodbury, Room 4G-064, Forrestal Building, 1000 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20585, (202) 252-4610.

DATES: Written comments postmarked by February 14, 1983, will be considered in the preparation of the DEIS. Comments postmarked after that date will be considered to the maximum extent practicable. Scoping meetings will be held in Grand Junction, Colorado, on February 8 & 9, 1983. Requests to speak at this meeting should be received by J. A. Morley at the above address by February 1, 1983. Requests to speak may also be made during registration for the meeting.

Background Information

In 1978 the U.S. Congress passed the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act. Pub. L. 95-604. In this Act the Congress found that uranium mill tailings may pose a potential and significant radiation health hazard to the public and directed the DOE to designate processing sites for remedial action to remove this potential hazard. The DOE has designated 24 sites for remedial action, including the former Climax Uranium Company site near Grand Junction, Colorado. Public Law 95-604 requires that the DOE carry out remedial action at each site in cooperation with other agencies and with the States and Indian tribes affected by the action. The NRC's statutory responsibilities include consulting with the DOE over a range of subjects concerning the conduct of the

remedial action, concurring with the selected remedial action and with any cooperative agreement with a State or Indian tribe, and licensing the long-term maintenance and monitoring of each tailings-disposal site after the remedial action is completed. In view of its statutorily-prescribed role in connection with the remedial action program, the NRC has agreed to participate as a "cooperating agency" as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1508.5). In addition, the EPA was given the responsibility to set standards to protect public health, safety, and the environment at the tailings sites and the disposal sites. Any remedial action must be in accordance with these EPA standards. The EPA published final standards governing the cleanup and disposal of the mill tailings and other residual radioactive materials in the Federal Register of January 5, 1983 (48 FR 590).

Pursuant to Pub. L. 95-604, the DOE and the State of Colorado entered into a cooperative agreement, effective October 19, 1981, in order to implement the remedial action program at the nine Colorado processing sites designated by the DOE, including the former Climax Uranium Company site near Grand Junction. The State of Colorado will assist the DOE in scoping, scoping meetings, hearings on the draft EIS, and in connection with other NEPA process matters.

The former Climax Uranium Company site is south of Grand Junction, just outside the city limits. From 1951 to 1970 a mill built on the site processed uranium and vanadium ores. Between 1951 and 1966 uranium and some vanadium was produced under contract to the Federal government. The rest of the vanadium was sold commercially, as was the uranium produced after 1966. The original 203-acre site was owned by the Climax Uranium Company, but between 1970 and 1978 the land was divided and sold. Some of the mill buildings are still standing, and the tailings from the operations remain in one large pile covering about 59 acres. The tailings pile, the mill-building area, and the area of the old effluent ponds now comprise the processing site designated for remedial action by the DOE. Portions of the designated site are owned by the Sand Extraction Company (61 acres), Bess Investments (7 acres), and the State of Colorado (40 acres). The remaining 95 acres, although not included in the designated site, will be considered for clean up as vicinity properties.

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In addition, about 300,000 tons of tailings were carried offsite and used locally in building materials and as fill on properties in the vicinity of Grand Junction. In 1972, Congress passed Pub. L. 92-314 (later amended by Pub. L. 95-236) authorizing a cooperative Federal and State program to perform remedial actions on structures in Grand Junction. Several hundred structures have been cleaned up under this program. The tailings and other contaminated materials removed during this work are being temporarily stored on the State-owned portion of the designated site and will be permanently disposed of along with the undisturbed tailings as part of the present remedial action program.

The DOE has made preliminary assessments of the tailings pile at the former Climax Uranium Company site and of possible remedial actions. A document describing the preliminary assessments of the Grand Junction tailings is the "Phase II Title I Engineering Assessment of Inactive Uranium Mill Tailings, Grand Junction Site, Grand Junction, Colorado" (DOE/UMT-0105), which is available for public inspection at the locations listed at the end of this notice. The State of Colorado investigated several areas in which the tailings might safely be permanently disposed of and recommended four of them to the DOE as possible candidate disposal sites for further study. The DOE has selected three of these sites for detailed analysis in the draft EIS.

In order to proceed with the selection of an appropriate remedial action, the DOE will prepare an EIS that will analyze the effects of a range of reasonable alternatives. After the completion of a final EIS, the plan for remedial action on the Grand Junction tailings will be selected, probably in 1984. The remedial action could then begin in 1985 and be completed during 1989, subject to the appropriation of sufficient funds by the Congress and by the State of Colorado to cover the remedial action costs.

Preliminary Identification of Environmental Issues

Major issues to be analyzed during the preparation of the EIS will include:

1. Exposures to radiation that the public and the workers on the project will receive from routine operations.
2. Exposures to radiation from hypothetical accidents that release radioactive material.
3. Effects on surface and ground waters.

4. Effects on transportation networks, including changes in traffic patterns and volumes.

5. Effects of accidents other than effects arising from releases of radioactive material.

6. Impacts to and within the floodplain of the Colorado River.

Other issues to be analyzed will include:

1. Changes in air quality caused by dust and other pollutants.

2. Effects on soils and mineral resources.

3. Effects on plants and animals.

4. Changes in land use.

5. Changes in noise levels during the actions.

6. Effects on scenic, historic, and cultural resources.

7. Changes in population and effects on housing, social structure, services, and economic structure in the communities near the affected places.

8. Expected use of energy and other resources.

9. Benefits of reprocessing the tailings to recover minerals.

The lists are not intended to be all-inclusive nor to be a predetermination of impacts.

Analyses of the listed effects will be made for the mill-tailings site, the disposal sites, the reprocessing sites if any, the transportation routes, and (to the extent feasible) the sites where cover material is obtained. The analyses will cover both the time when the remedial action is in progress and the time after it has been completed.

Preliminary Definition of Alternatives

The DOE will consider all reasonable alternatives to the proposed action and their environmental impacts. The alternative actions presently proposed for analysis in the draft EIS are briefly listed below. This list will be finalized following the scoping process.

Alternative 1: No Action

Under this alternative, the tailings pile would be left in place; no measures would be taken to control or stabilize the tailings.

Alternative 2: Stabilization in Place

This alternative consists of decontaminating Grand Junction vicinity properties and consolidating all residual radioactive materials removed from such properties with the tailings pile at the former Climax Uranium Company site. All mill tailings and residual radioactive materials would then be stabilized at the site, including the emplacement of cover material to reduce the radon flux in accordance with prescribed EPA standards.

Alternative 3: Decontamination of the Former Climax Uranium Company Site and Removal of the Tailings to a New Disposal Site

This alternative involves selecting a site for stabilization and control of the tailings and other residual radioactive materials other than the former Climax Uranium Company site. All residual radioactive materials removed from Grand Junction vicinity properties and the uranium mill tailings pile at the former Climax Uranium Company site would be transported to one of the following State-recommended sites:

a. 6&50 Reservoir Site. The site is about 24 miles northwest of Grand Junction and about 6 miles west of the community of Mack. Route 6&50 runs north of the site, and Interstate 70 passes to the south. The site is used for grazing, and there are no oil and gas leases on the site. The site is underlain by Mancos Formation shale.

b. Cheney Reservoir Site. The site is about 17 miles southwest of Grand Junction and 5 miles southeast of the community of Whitewater. The site lies near Route 50 and is used for grazing. An electric power-transmission line runs across the site. The area just north, along Kannah Creek, is intensively farmed. There are a number of oil and gas leases on the site. Parcels of privately owned land adjoin the site on three sides. The site is underlain by Mancos Formation shale.

c. Lucas Mesa Site. The Lucas Mesa site is 2 miles south of the Colorado River on a mesa that rises about 1000 feet above the surrounding terrain. It is about 4 miles from the town of DeBeque and about 40 miles east of Grand Junction. The site, which is Federally owned, is used for grazing and is subject to several leases for oil and gas exploration. The site is surrounded by privately owned parcels of land, and the land to the north in the Colorado River valley is intensively farmed. The site is underlain by the Wasatch Formation.

Disposal of the Grand Junction tailings at Lucas Mesa is a reasonable alternative only if the Rifle tailings are also disposed of there. The EIS being prepared for remedial action on the Rifle tailings will address the cumulative site-specific impacts of disposal at Lucas Mesa. The decision on the Rifle tailings will be made prior to or concurrently with the decision on the Grand Junction tailings.

The other site nominated by the State is the East Salt Creek site, which is similar to and in the same area as the 6&50 Reservoir site.

Comments and Scoping Meeting

The DOE invites all interested parties to submit written comments or suggestions on the draft EIS and to attend the scoping meetings. The purposes of the meetings and of the request for written comments are to provide the DOE, the NRC, and the State with as much information from as many viewpoints as possible and to provide interested persons with opportunities to express their views. The DOE will then determine, in consultation with the NRC and the State, the scope of the issues to be addressed in the draft EIS and will identify the significant issues related to the remedial action.

Public scoping meetings will be held in Grand Junction, Colorado, on February 8 & 9, 1983. The time and place will be announced in local news publications; they may also be obtained from J. A. Morley at the address given above.

Persons desiring to make oral comments at the meetings should mail their requests to J.A. Morley at the above address and should write "Grand Junction scoping meetings" on the envelope. They should notify the DOE of their desire to speak before February 1, 1983, so that the DOE may arrange a schedule for the presentations.

The DOE will establish procedures governing the conduct of the meetings. The meetings will not be conducted as evidentiary hearings, and those who choose to make statements may not be cross-examined by other speakers. To ensure that everyone who wishes to speak has a chance to do so, five minutes will be allotted to each speaker. Depending on the number of persons requesting to be heard, the DOE may allow longer times for representatives of organizations; persons wishing to speak on behalf of an organization should identify the organization in their request. Persons who have not submitted a request to speak in advance may register to speak at the scoping meetings; they will be called on to present their comments if time permits.

Written comments and suggestions for issues to be addressed in the draft EIS should be sent to J.A. Morley at the address given above by February 14, 1983. Written comments will be considered and given equal weight with oral comments in the preparation of the EIS.

On the completion of the draft EIS, notice of its availability will be announced in the *Federal Register*, and the Department of Energy will again solicit comments. Persons who do not desire to submit comments or suggestions during the scoping period

but who wish to receive a copy of the draft EIS for review and comment when it is issued should notify J. A. Morley at the above address. Persons seeking further information may inquire at either of the addresses given above.

Transcripts of the scoping meetings will be prepared by the DOE. Members of the public may inspect the transcripts of the scoping meetings and other documents now planned for use in preparing the draft EIS at the following locations:

Freedom of Information Reading Room,
Room 1E-190, Forrestal Building, U.S.
Department of Energy, 1000
Independence Avenue, S.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20585

Bendix Field Engineering Corporation
Library, P.O. Box 2557, Grand
Junction, Colorado 81502

Mesa County Library, 530 Grand
Avenue, Grand Junction, Colorado
81501, Attn: Terry Pickens

Learning Resource Center, Mesa
College, P.O. Box 2647, Grand
Junction, Colorado 81502, Attn: Mr.
Charles Hendrickson

Rifle Branch Library, 337 East Avenue,
Rifle, Colorado 81650

Regional Energy/Environment
Information Center, Denver Public
Library, 1357 Broadway, Denver,
Colorado 80210

Dated at Washington, D.C., this 17th day of
January 1983, for the United States
Department of Energy.

William A. Vaughan,

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

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Inactive Uranium Mill Tailings Sites Near Rifle, Colo.; Compliance With the National Environmental Policy Act; Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Conduct a Public Scoping Meeting for Remedial Actions

AGENCY: Energy Department.

ACTION: Notice is hereby given that the Department of Energy intends to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to assess the environmental implications of remedial actions to be performed on the inactive uranium mill tailings piles and vicinity properties near Rifle, Colorado.

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE) announces its intent to prepare an EIS, in accordance with Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to provide environmental input into the selection of

an appropriate remedial action in connection with uranium mill tailings and other residual radioactive materials at two inactive uranium mills near Rifle, Colorado, and at residences, commercial buildings, and open lands in the Rifle area which are contaminated with mill tailings derived from the inactive uranium mills. The DOE's proposed action is to perform remedial action pursuant to Pub. L. 95-604, the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978. Such remedial actions consist of those measures taken to stabilize or control the mill tailings to the extent necessary to ensure that the radiological and non-radiological impacts from the mill tailings do not exceed the standards for the protection of the public health, safety, and environment promulgated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EIS will consider the options of remedial action and no remedial action. In addition, the EIS will consider the following remedial action alternatives: stabilization of the tailings in their present locations, consolidation and stabilization of the tailings at one of the present locations, and removal of the tailings from both locations to a new disposal site. The DOE is serving as the lead agency for preparation of the EIS; Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) will participate as a cooperating agency.

The DOE invites interested agencies, organizations, and members of the general public to submit comments or suggestions for consideration in connection with the preparation of the draft EIS. Comments or suggestions to assist the DOE in identifying significant environmental issues and the appropriate scope of the draft EIS are requested. Comments may be submitted by mail or presented at scoping meetings to be held in Rifle, Colorado, on February 7 & 8, 1983. On completion of the draft EIS, notice of its availability will be announced in the *Federal Register* and local news media, and comments will be solicited. Comments on the draft EIS will be considered in preparing the final EIS.

ADDRESS: Written comments or suggestions on the scope of the EIS and requests to speak at the scoping meetings may be submitted to: Mr. James A. Morley, Uranium Mill Tailings Project Office, Albuquerque Operations Office, Department of Energy, P.O. Box 5400, Albuquerque, NM 87115, (505) 844-3941.

Envelopes should be marked "DEIS for Rifle tailings piles."

General information on the process followed by the DOE in preparing environmental impact statements may be obtained from: Office of