

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY
NEPA DETERMINATION



RECIPIENT: Rice University

STATE: TX

PROJECT TITLE: Direct and Continuous Electrochemical Manufacturing of High-purity Lithium Hydroxide from Geothermal Brines in a Solid Electrolyte Reactor

Funding Opportunity Announcement Number	Procurement Instrument Number	NEPA Control Number	CID Number
DE-FOA-0002823	DE-EE0010881	GFO-0010881-001	GO10881

Based on my review of the information concerning the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (authorized under DOE Policy 451.1), I have made the following determination:

CX, EA, EIS APPENDIX AND NUMBER:

Description:

A9 Information gathering, analysis, and dissemination

Information gathering (including, but not limited to, literature surveys, inventories, site visits, and audits), data analysis (including, but not limited to, computer modeling), document preparation (including, but not limited to, conceptual design, feasibility studies, and analytical energy supply and demand studies), and information dissemination (including, but not limited to, document publication and distribution, and classroom training and informational programs), but not including site characterization or environmental monitoring. (See also B3.1 of appendix B to this subpart.)

B3.15 Small-scale indoor research and development projects using nanoscale materials

Siting, construction, modification, operation, and decommissioning of facilities for indoor small-scale research and development projects and small-scale pilot projects using nanoscale materials in accordance with applicable requirements (such as engineering, worker safety, procedural, and administrative regulations) necessary to ensure the containment of any hazardous materials. Construction and modification activities would be within or contiguous to a previously disturbed or developed area (where active utilities and currently used roads are readily accessible).

Rationale for determination:

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is proposing to provide funding to Rice University to research continuous and direct electrochemical extraction of high purity lithium hydroxide (LiOH) from geothermal brines using a porous solid electrolyte (PSE) reactor. The proposed project activities include design, development, fabrication, assembly, and testing of electrochemical reactor systems for lithium extraction, as well as data analysis. All proposed project activities would occur at Rice University in Houston, TX.

Award activities would be completed over three Budget Periods (BPs,) with Go/No Go Decision Points between the BPs. This NEPA determination applies to all three BPs.

Project activities would involve the use and handling of various hazardous materials, including metals and chemicals. All such handling would occur in-lab following proper hazardous material handling and disposal practices. Hazardous materials would be managed in accordance with federal, state, and local environmental regulations. Existing University health and safety policies and procedures would be followed, including employee training, proper protective equipment, engineering controls, monitoring, and internal assessments. Nanoscale materials would be handled using proper engineering controls until adhered to surface materials.

All project work would be performed at existing, purpose-built laboratory facilities. No modifications to existing facilities, ground disturbing activities, or changes to the use, mission, or operation of existing facilities would be required. No additional permits, licenses, or authorizations would be required. DOE does not anticipate any impacts to resources of concern due to the proposed award activities.

NEPA PROVISION

DOE has made a final NEPA determination.

Notes:

Advanced Materials & Manufacturing Technologies Office (AMMTO)
NEPA review completed by Melissa Parker, 12/19/23

FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATIONS

The proposed action (or the part of the proposal defined in the Rationale above) fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D. To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not: (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders; (2) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities; (3) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (5) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those listed in paragraph B(5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

The proposed action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. This proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211 concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

SIGNATURE OF THIS MEMORANDUM CONSTITUTES A RECORD OF THIS DECISION.

NEPA Compliance Officer Signature:  _____ Date: 12/19/2023
NEPA Compliance Officer

FIELD OFFICE MANAGER DETERMINATION

- Field Office Manager review not required
- Field Office Manager review required

BASED ON MY REVIEW I CONCUR WITH THE DETERMINATION OF THE NCO :

Field Office Manager's Signature: _____ Date: _____
Field Office Manager