

Decision and publish it in the **Federal Register**.

Signed in Washington, DC, this 16th day of February 1999.

Peter N. Brush,

*Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary,
Environment, Safety and Health.*

[FR Doc. 99-4289 Filed 2-19-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6450-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Alternatives to the In-Tank Precipitation Process at the Savannah River Site, Aiken, SC

AGENCY: Department of Energy.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE) intends to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on the proposed replacement of the in-tank precipitation (ITP) process at the Savannah River Site (SRS) near Aiken, South Carolina. The ITP process was intended to separate soluble high-activity radionuclides (for example, cesium, strontium, uranium, and plutonium) from liquid high-level radioactive waste before vitrifying the high-activity fraction of the waste in the Defense Waste Processing Facility and disposing of the low-activity fraction as saltstone in vaults at the SRS. Initial ITP testing and operation and subsequent studies have demonstrated that the ITP process as presently configured cannot achieve production goals and safety requirements for processing high-level waste. In response, DOE, Westinghouse Savannah River Company, and independent reviewers evaluated a large number of alternative technologies to identify viable alternatives to the ITP process. DOE determined that three technologies should undergo further research and design to determine the most appropriate replacement for the ITP process. Because replacement of the ITP process constitutes a substantial change to the operation of the Defense Waste Processing Facility as evaluated in a 1994 SEIS (DOE/EIS-0082-S), DOE will prepare a second SEIS that will address the potential environmental impacts of alternatives to the ITP process. DOE invites comments on the scope of this SEIS.

DATES: The public scoping period begins with the publication of this Notice and concludes April 8, 1999. DOE invites Federal agencies, Native American tribes, State and local governments, and the public to comment on the scope of this SEIS. DOE will consider all

comments received by the close of the scoping period, and will consider comments received after that date to the extent practicable.

Two public scoping workshops will be held during the scoping period: March 11, 1999, 2:00-4:00 pm and 6:00-8:00 pm, Holiday Inn Coliseum, 630 Assembly Street, Columbia, South Carolina; and March 18, 1999, 2:00-4:00 pm and 6:00-8:00 pm, North Augusta Community Center, 101 Brookside Drive, North Augusta, South Carolina.

These scoping workshops will provide information about SRS high-level waste processing and the proposal to replace the ITP process, including the alternatives being considered. The workshops will provide opportunities for the public to comment orally or in writing on the SEIS scope, including the alternatives and issues that DOE should consider in the SEIS.

ADDRESSES: Comments on the scope of the SEIS may be mailed to the address below or sent by fax, voice mail, or electronic mail. Written comments on the scope of this EIS may be mailed to Andrew Grainger, NEPA Compliance Officer, Savannah River Operations Office, U.S. Department of Energy, Building 742A, Room 183, Aiken, South Carolina 29802. Attention: ITP SEIS.

Otherwise, call 800-881-7292 for toll-free 24-hour fax and voice mail (local and nationwide), or send electronic mail to nepa@srs.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To request information about this SEIS and the public scoping workshops, or to be placed on the SEIS distribution list, use any of the methods listed in **ADDRESSES** above. For general information about the DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, contact: Carol Borgstrom, Director, Office of NEPA Policy and Assistance (EH-42), U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20585-0119. Phone: 202-586-4600, or leave a message at: 800-472-2756. Fax: 202-586-7031.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background and Need for Agency Action

At its inception in the 1950s, the primary mission of the SRS was to produce nuclear materials to support the defense programs of the United States. This mission largely ended and production of nuclear materials ceased following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Before production ended, however, chemical separation of irradiated nuclear reactor fuel at SRS had generated special nuclear materials

and high-level radioactive waste consisting of acidic liquids bearing radioactive fission products, including small amounts of transuranic elements. This waste was made alkaline and stored as insoluble sludges and liquid supernate containing high- and low-activity salts in solution in 51 large underground tanks at the SRS F- and H-Area Tank Farms. Two tanks have been closed, and now approximately 129 million liters (34 million gallons) of high-level radioactive waste are stored in 49 tanks.

These tanks are one of seven interconnected parts of the high-level waste management system at the SRS:

- (1) High-level Waste Storage and Evaporation (in the F- and H-Area Tank Farms);
- (2) Salt Processing (through the ITP process and in the Late Wash Facility);
- (3) Sludge Processing (in the Extended Sludge Processing Facility);
- (4) High-level Waste Vitrification (in the Defense Waste Processing Facility);
- (5) Wastewater Treatment (in the Effluent Treatment Facility);
- (6) Low-activity Salt Solidification (in the Saltstone Facility); and
- (7) Organic Waste Destruction (in the Consolidated Incineration Facility).

This system, except for salt processing through ITP and in the Late Wash Facility, is operational. ITP operations are currently limited to safe storage and transfer of materials. The Late Wash Facility has been tested and is in standby status.

The ITP process was first applied to radioactive waste in September 1995. The process was carried out in batches in a large tank. Precipitating reagents were added to high-level liquid waste to separate the high-activity waste fraction (for example, cesium, strontium, uranium, and plutonium) from the low-activity fraction. Monosodium titanate was used to adsorb strontium, uranium, and plutonium, and then sodium tetraphenylborate was added to precipitate cesium. The high-activity fraction (adsorbed radionuclides and precipitate) was to be vitrified in the Defense Waste Processing Facility for eventual disposal in a geologic repository, and the low-activity fraction was to be solidified in the Saltstone Facility and disposed of in the SRS saltstone vaults in the Z-Area.

In December 1995, DOE found that the ITP process was generating benzene at higher rates than expected. The benzene is a flammable decomposition byproduct of sodium tetraphenylborate. In August 1996, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, an independent executive branch organization chartered to provide advice regarding public

health and safety issues at DOE defense nuclear facilities, recommended that testing and operating the ITP process not proceed until DOE had an improved understanding of how benzene could be generated and released during the ITP process. ITP operations were suspended in January 1998.

Subsequent studies demonstrated that the ITP process as currently configured cannot achieve production goals and meet safety requirements for processing the high-activity salt fraction of high-level waste. In response, DOE, Westinghouse Savannah River Company, and independent reviewers evaluated a large number of alternative technologies to identify viable alternatives to the ITP process ("DOE-SR Review Team Final Report on the High Level Waste Salt Disposition Alternatives," December 1998). This evaluation resulted in the preparation of pre-conceptual designs for four technologies: (1) small tank in-tank precipitation (using tetraphenylborate), (2) ion exchange (using crystalline silicotitanate), (3) direct disposal as grout, and (4) caustic side solvent extraction. Of these four technologies, DOE has determined that the solvent extraction alternative is not sufficiently developed to warrant further analysis.

DOE has determined that replacing the ITP process would substantially change the proposed operation of the Defense Waste Processing Facility as evaluated in DOE's 1994 Supplemental EIS (DOE/EIS-0082-S). DOE therefore will prepare a Supplemental EIS to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of replacing the ITP process, in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality National Environmental Policy Act regulations (40 CFR 1502.9(c)).

The SEIS Schedule

DOE intends to complete this SEIS by about February 2000. DOE will issue a Record of Decision no sooner than 30 days after publication of the Environmental Protection Agency notice of availability of the Final SEIS. DOE will begin detailed design for an ITP replacement technology only after issuing a Record of Decision that selects such a technology.

Alternatives

In the SEIS, DOE will assess the potential impacts of three ITP replacement processes and a no-action alternative. DOE does not have a preferred alternative at this time.

Small Tank In-Tank Precipitation: This alternative would use the same chemicals and process as the existing ITP batch process, but would operate

continuously in smaller tanks. High-level liquid waste from the tanks would undergo precipitation within continuously stirred tank (chemical) reactors to separate the high-activity waste fraction from the low-activity fraction. That is, strontium, uranium, and plutonium would be adsorbed on monosodium titanate and cesium would be precipitated with sodium tetraphenylborate. Benzene generation would be at approximately the level predicted for the ITP process in the 1994 SEIS. The high-activity fraction (adsorbed radionuclides and precipitate) would be vitrified in the Defense Waste Processing Facility for eventual disposal in a geologic repository, and the low-activity fraction would be solidified in the Saltstone Facility and disposed of in the SRS saltstone vaults in the Z-Area. Implementation of this alternative would require the construction and operation of a new treatment facility in H-Area. Closure of the high-level waste tanks, which DOE is now evaluating in an EIS (Notice of Intent, 63 FR 71628, December 29, 1998), would not be affected.

Ion Exchange: This alternative would use a different ion exchange medium from that considered in the 1994 SEIS and would not result in benzene formation. High-level liquid waste would first be mixed with monosodium titanate and filtered to remove adsorbed uranium, plutonium, and strontium. Then crystalline silicotitanate resin ion exchange columns would be used to remove cesium from the salt solution. The high-activity fraction (adsorbed radionuclides and cesium-bearing resins) would be vitrified in the Defense Waste Processing Facility for eventual disposal in a geologic repository, and the low-activity fraction would be solidified in the Saltstone Facility and disposed of in the SRS saltstone vaults in the Z-Area. Implementation of this alternative would require the construction and operation of a new treatment facility in H-Area. Closure of the high-level waste tanks would not be affected.

Direct Disposal as Grout: In this alternative, high-level liquid waste would be mixed with monosodium titanate and filtered to remove adsorbed uranium, plutonium, and strontium. The adsorbed solids would be vitrified in the Defense Waste Processing Facility for eventual disposal in a geologic repository. The filtered salt solution, which would contain radioactive cesium, would be combined with grout in a facility that would be constructed under this alternative, and disposed of in the SRS saltstone vaults in the Z-

Area. Closure of the high-level waste tanks would not be affected.

No-Action Alternative: The no-action alternative would be to continue current activities without the ITP process. The Defense Waste Processing Facility would vitrify only sludge from the high-level waste tanks. Salt solution would not be removed from the high-level waste tanks and therefore the tank closures could not be completed.

Related NEPA Decisions and Reviews

This SEIS will consider the information and analyses found in several final DOE NEPA reviews that address high-level waste management systems at SRS:

- Final Environmental Impact Statement, Defense Waste Processing Facility, Savannah River Plant, Aiken, S.C., DOE/EIS-0082, 1982.
- Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Defense Waste Processing Facility, DOE/EIS-0082-S, 1994.
- Final Environmental Impact Statement, Savannah River Site Waste Management, DOE/EIS-0217, 1995.
- Supplement Analysis, Defense Waste Processing Facility Salt Disposition Options at the Savannah River Site, DOE/EIS-0082-SA-03, November 1998.

The documents are available in the following DOE public reading rooms: DOE Freedom of Information Reading Room, Forrestal Building, Room 1E-190, 1000 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20585 (phone 202-586-6020); and DOE Public Document Room, University of South Carolina, Aiken Campus, University Library, Second Floor, 171 University Parkway, Aiken, SC 29801 (phone 803-648-6851).

DOE also will use additional information and analyses, including engineering design and research studies developed during the preliminary evaluation of alternatives to the ITP process, and reviews of the design and research conducted by independent experts.

Preliminary Identification of EIS Issues

DOE intends to address the following issues when considering the potential environmental impacts of the ITP replacement alternatives in this EIS. DOE invites comment from Federal agencies, Native American tribes, State and local governments, and the public on these and any other issues that should be addressed in the EIS.

- Effects on air, soil, and surface and ground water from construction, routine operations, and reasonably foreseeable accidents.

- Impacts to ecological resources, including threatened and endangered species, floodplains, and wetlands.
- Health impacts to the public and SRS workers from exposure to radiological and hazardous materials during routine operations and reasonably foreseeable accidents.
- Socioeconomic impacts, including impacts associated with the workforce required to construct and operate an ITP replacement.
- Disproportionately high and adverse impacts to minority and low-income populations (environmental justice).
- Compliance with applicable Federal, State and local requirements and agreements.
- Effects of constructing and operating an ITP replacement technology on SRS waste management operations and facilities.
- Relationship to SRS land use plans.
- Pollution prevention, waste minimization, and energy and water use reduction technologies to reduce the use of energy, water, and hazardous substances and to minimize environmental impacts during construction and operation of an ITP replacement.
- Impacts on cultural and historic resources.
- Cumulative environmental impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future operations at the SRS.
- Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources.

Issued in Washington, DC, on February 16, 1999.

Peter N. Brush,

*Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Environment, Safety and Health.*

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Docket No. TM99-6-23-000]

Eastern Shore Natural Gas Company; Notice of Proposed Changes in FERC Gas Tariff

February 16, 1999.

Take notice that on February 10, 1999, Eastern Shore Natural Gas Company (ESNG) tendered for filing as part of its FERC Gas Tariff, Second Revised Volume No. 1, certain revised tariff sheets in the above captioned docket. Such revised tariff sheets bear proposed effective dates of January 1, 1999 and February 1, 1999, respectively.

ESNG states the purpose of the instant filing is to track rate changes attributable to storage service purchased from Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Corporation (Transco) under its Rate Schedules GSS and LSS, respectfully, the costs of which comprise the rates and charges payable under ESNG's respective Rate Schedule GSS and LSS. Transco filed its GSS and LSS storage tracking filing on January 27, 1999. This tracking filing is being made pursuant to Section 3 of ESNG's Rate Schedule GSS and LSS.

ESNG states that copies of the filing have been served upon its jurisdictional customers and interested State Commissions.

Any person desiring to be heard or to protest said filing should file a motion to intervene or a protest with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20426, in accordance with Sections 385.214 or 385.211 of the Commission's Rules and Regulations. All such motions or protests must be filed in accordance with § 154.210 of the Commission's Regulations. Protests will be considered by the Commission in determining the appropriate action to be taken, but will not serve to make protestants parties to the proceedings. Any person wishing to become a party must file a motion to intervene. Copies of this filing are on file with the Commission and are available for public inspection in the Public Reference Room. This filing may be viewed on the web at <http://www.ferc.fed.us/online/rims.htm> (call 202-208-2222 for assistance).

Linwood A. Watson, Jr.,

Acting Secretary.

[FR Doc. 99-4232 Filed 2-19-99; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Project No. 1994-004 Utah]

Heber Light & Power Company; Notice of Availability of Final Environmental Assessment

February 16, 1999.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (Commission) regulations, 18 CFR Part 380 (Order No. 486, 52 FR 47897), the Office of Hydropower Licensing has reviewed the application for a new license for the Snake Creek Hydroelectric Project. The project is located on Snake Creek and

partially within the Uinta National Forest, in Wasatch County, Utah.

On October 9, 1998, the Commission staff issued a draft environmental assessment (DEA) for the project and requested that comments be filed with the Commission within 30 days. Comments on the DEA were filed by one entity and are addressed in the final environmental assessment (FEA) for the project.

The FEA contains the staff's analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the project and concludes that licensing the project, with appropriate environmental protective measures, would not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The U.S.D.A. Forest Service cooperated with the Commission by reviewing and commenting on drafts of the FEA.

Copies of the FEA are available for review in the Public Reference Room, Room 2A, of the Commission's offices at 888 First Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20426. The EA may also be viewed on the web at <http://www.ferc.fed.us/online/rims.htm> (please call (202) 208-2222 for assistance).

Linwood A. Watson, Jr.,

Acting Secretary.

[FR Doc. 99-4229 Filed 2-19-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6717-01-M

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Docket No. MT99-6-000]

Mid Louisiana Gas Company; Notice of Proposed Changes in FERC Gas Tariff

February 16, 1999.

Take notice that on February 10, 1999, Mid Louisiana Gas Company (Mid Louisiana) tendered for filing as part of its FERC Gas Tariff, Third Revised Volume No. 1, the following tariff sheets, with an effective date of March 11, 1999:

Fifth Revised Sheet No. 130
Eighth Revised Sheet No. 131

Mid Louisiana states that the primary purpose of the filing of the Revised Tariff Sheets(s) is to update its tariff to reflect recent changes in shared personnel and facilities.

Pursuant to Section 154.7(a)(7) of the Commission's Regulations, Mid Louisiana respectfully requests waiver of any requirement of the Regulations in order to permit the tendered tariff sheet to become effective March 11, 1999, as submitted.