



URANIUM PROCESSING

International Isotopes reaches license limits agreement with New Mexico

NO NUCLEAR WASTE generated by a proposed first-of-its-kind uranium deconversion and fluorine extraction processing facility in New Mexico would be disposed of within the state, according to an agreement reached between International Isotopes Inc. and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED).

International Isotopes said on October 26 that it had entered into a memorandum of agreement with NMED that establishes mutually agreed upon license limits for the proposed facility to be built near Hobbs, N.M., that would process depleted uranium hexafluoride tails from uranium enrichment plants and convert the remaining material into uranium oxide for disposal as low-level waste.

Ron Curry, cabinet secretary for NMED, said that the agreement will “protect the state and the citizens of New Mexico into the future, while also allowing International Isotopes to operate here.”

Steve Laflin, president of International Isotopes, said that the agreement is important for two reasons. “First,” he said, “it represents completion of an important step in the preparation of the NRC license application. Second, it typifies the company’s continued commitment to protecting the environment and working closely with NMED to ensure project transparency and regulatory cooperation.”

Both parties have agreed that the terms of the agreement will be incorporated into the license application that the company plans to submit to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and will become part of the license itself if the NRC issues one.

The agreement exceeds any waste-disposal specifications for the facility that New Mexico could have achieved through the NRC’s licensing process, according to Curry. “We are gratified to reach an agreement that stipulates no waste from the facility will be disposed within the state of New Mexico,” he said.

The facility will consist of a depleted ura-

The waste from a proposed uranium deconversion and processing facility in New Mexico would be disposed of outside the state.

anium deconversion process and a fluorine gas extraction process. The company holds patents giving it exclusive rights to the fluorine extraction process, which it said would produce “high-value, high-purity gases” in conjunction with uranium deconversion, and would provide “a key commercial advantage to the deconversion plant.”

The company did not say where waste from the new facility would end up when shipped out of state.

International Isotopes expects to hire about 150 construction workers for the project and anticipates that it will eventually have a full-time staff of about 130 to 150 employees for plant operations. The construction of the facility is anticipated to begin in the third quarter of 2011, after NRC licensing is complete. The facility is expected to begin operations in late 2012.

The company said that it has been working for a long time to address regulatory issues associated with the proposed facility. It has also been educating the public and the investment community about “the important ‘green’ ecological aspects” of the facility, it said.

The company in March announced the selection of the Hobbs area as the site of the proposed facility, which is expected to have a significant positive economic impact on New Mexico, the company said. In addition, public support for the project remains strong, and the company said that it has been working with the state and the area residents to ensure continued understanding of the project and its benefits to New Mexico.

International Isotopes, headquartered in Idaho Falls, Idaho, manufactures nuclear medicine calibration and reference standards, high-purity fluoride gases, and cobalt-

60 products such as teletherapy sources. It also provides radioisotopes and radiochemicals for medical devices, calibration, clinical research, life sciences, and industrial applications, and it performs analytical, measurement, recycling, and processing services for clients on a contract basis.