



U PROCESSING

NRC accepting hearing requests for new U facility

The NRC has set a June 4 deadline for requesting a hearing or leave to intervene in International Isotopes' licensing proceeding.

THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY Commission in the April 5 *Federal Register* published a notice of opportunity to request a hearing in the licensing proceeding for International Isotopes Fluorine Products Inc.'s proposed fluoride extraction and uranium deconversion facility in Lea County, N.M. The notice also includes instructions for requesting access to documents containing sensitive unclassified non-safeguards information regarding the project. Requests for a hearing or leave to intervene must be filed with the NRC by June 4, 2010.

In March 2009, International Isotopes announced that it had selected a 640-acre site just west of Hobbs, N.M., for the facility, which will use the company's fluorine extraction process (FEP) technology to process depleted uranium tails resulting from uranium enrichment. In June, the company announced that it had completed a conceptual design report for the project, and in December, it submitted a license application for the facility (*NN*, Feb. 2010, p. 47). Construction is expected to be completed by the end of 2012.

Depleted uranium hexafluoride (DUF₆) is generated in large quantities in the process of enriching natural uranium for use in nuclear fuel. International Isotopes will deconvert DUF₆ to depleted uranium tetrafluoride (DUF₄) and then use the FEP technology to extract high-value specialty gases from the DUF₄. The remainder of the uranium tails will then be converted into a stable chemical form that can be safely stored or disposed of, the company said. Since late 2006, International Isotopes has been operating an FEP demonstration plant at its facility in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

The proposed facility is projected to be capable of deconverting up to 7.5 million lb per year of DUF₆, which would come from commercial enrichment facilities throughout the United States. The process is primarily chemical, but because it also involves NRC-licensed source material, International Isotopes would have to comply with applicable portions of 10 CFR Part 40, among other regulations.

An NRC administrative review, documented in a letter to the company dated February 23, 2010, found the application acceptable for a technical review to begin (*NN*, Apr. 2010, p. 78). If the NRC approves the application, it will issue an operating license. Before reaching a decision on the proposed application, however, the NRC must prepare a safety evaluation report and an environmental impact statement, both of which will document certain findings as required by law and the NRC's regulations.

The *FR* notice says that any person whose interest may be affected by this proceeding and who wishes to participate as a party in the proceeding must file a written petition for leave to intervene. Details on submitting a petition are included in the *FR* notice, available at <<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-7600.htm>>.

A person filing electronically using the NRC's adjudicatory E-Filing system may seek assistance by contacting the NRC Meta System Help Desk through the "Contact Us" link on the NRC Web site, at <www.nrc.gov/site-help/e-submittals.html>; by e-mail to <MSHD.Resource@nrc.gov>; or by phone, toll-free to 866/672-7640. Requests for hearings and petitions to intervene may also be submitted by e-mail to <hearing.docket@nrc.gov>.