Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the environmental assessment, the Commission concludes that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, the Commission has determined not to prepare an environmental impact statement for the proposed action.

For further details with respect to the proposed action, see the licensee's application dated June 9, 1997, which is available for public inspection at the Commission's Public Document Room, the Gelman Building, 2120 L Street, NW., Washington, DC, and at the local public document room located at the Plymouth Public Library, 11 North Street, Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 9th day of December 1997.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Ronald B. Eaton,

Acting Director, Project Directorate I–3, Division of Reactor Projects—I/II, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation.

[FR Doc. 97–32620 Filed 12–12–97; 8:45 am]

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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

[Docket No. 40–7580]

Consideration of License Amendment Request for the Fansteel, Inc., Facility in Muskogee, Oklahoma

AGENCY: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact for the Fansteel, Inc., Facility in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering the amendment of Source Material License SMB–911 to authorize processing of waste treatment pond residues at the Fansteel, Inc., facility located in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Summary of the Environmental Assessment

Identification of the Proposed Action

Fansteel, Inc. is currently authorized to process residues designated as ''work-in-progress'' (WIP) materials to extract tantalum, niobium, and scandium for commercial use. The WIP residues contain natural uranium, thorium, and daughter decay products in quantities sufficient to be classified as source material by the NRC. Fansteel has proposed to modify this currently authorized operation to concurrently process wastewater treatment residues, which contain mostly calcium fluoride (CaF_2) and are located in ponds 6, 7, 8, and 9 at the site. This modification will result in production of three additional products: sodium fluoroaluminate, sodium sulfate, and calcium sulfate. The proposed action is to amend Fansteel License SMB–911 to authorize this modified process.

The Need for the Proposed Action

Fansteel has proposed the modified process, which includes processing of the wastewater treatment residues, in order to chemically improve the input stream for the operation, produce additional products for sale, and reduce the volume of solid waste requiring off-site disposal.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

Normal Operations

The NRC staff evaluated impacts from operations at the Fansteel site for both normal and accident conditions. During normal operations, small quantities of radiological and non-radiological effluents will be released to the environment. Radionuclides which may be released to the atmosphere include uranium-238, uranium-235, thorium-232, and their decay daughters, such as radon-222. Sources of the releases are the off-gas treatment system, fugitive dust, and radon emanation from the WIP ponds (ponds 2, 3, and 5) and the wastewater treatment ponds (ponds 6, 7, 8, and 9). The majority of the releases are expected to be in the form of insoluble oxide chemicals.

The staff performed a dose assessment to estimate the impact from radiological releases to the air. Atmospheric release exposure pathways included inhalation, ingestion of contaminated crops and resuspended dirt, and external exposure to the airborne plume and contaminated groundwater. For the combined sources (pond residue processing, fugitive dust, and pond residue radon), the largest tissue dose was estimated to be 1.9×10^{-5} Sv/yr (1.9 mrem/yr) to the lungs primarily from inhalation of radon-222. For the maximally exposed individual, the committed effective dose equivalent (CEDE) for combined releases from processing pond residues and fugitive dust was estimated as 3.2×10^{-7} Sv/yr (0.03 mrem/yr), while the CEDE for radon release was estimated as 5.4×10^{-7} Sv/yr (0.054 mrem/yr). External doses are a factor of 10,000 times less than internal doses.

For radionuclides released to the atmosphere other than radon, NRC regulations specified in 10 CFR 20.1101(d) require that the annual effective dose equivalent not exceed 1.0×10^{-4} Sv (10 mrem). The total effective dose equivalent (TEDE) from releases to the atmosphere was estimated at 8.6×10^{-7} Sv/yr (0.086 mrem/yr). This is a small fraction of the NRC limit.

Liquid effluents containing radiological contaminants will be released after treatment to the Arkansas River and will ultimately flow into the Mississippi River. Although downstream residents do not use the Arkansas River as a drinking water source, the NRC analysis conservatively assumes that an individual along the river and the surrounding population out to a distance of 80 kilometers (50 miles) uses this potentially contaminated water. Liquid release exposure pathways included ingestion of drinking water, fish, and irrigated crops and external exposure during recreational activities.

The largest tissue dose due to contaminated surface water was conservatively estimated to be 2.7×10^{-5} Sv/yr (2.7 mrem/yr) to the bone surface, and external doses are a factor of 1000 times smaller than internal doses. The CEDE for the maximally exposed individual was estimated as 3.0×10^{-6} Sv/yr (0.3 mrem/yr). For both the maximally exposed individual and other members of the population, doses are a small fraction of that from background sources.

NRC regulations specified in 10 CFR 20.1301 require that the TEDE from all pathways for members of the public not exceed 1.0×10^{-3} Sv (100 mrem) per year. For the maximally exposed individual, the annual TEDE from all releases from the proposed operation was estimated as 3.0×10^{-6} Sv (0.3 mrem). The largest annual tissue dose was estimated to be 2.7×10^{-5} Sv (2.7 mrem) to the bone surface. Estimated doses are small fractions of applicable limits and of the background dose, which is on the order of 1×10^{-3} to 4×10^{-3} Sv/yr (100 to 400 mrem/yr).

The NRC staff also assessed impacts from releases of non-radiological contaminants to air, surface water, and groundwater. The most significant non-radiological gaseous effluent from processing is expected to be hydrogen fluoride (HF). However, normal operation of the only stack at the facility is not expected to have a significant effect on off-site nonradiological air quality. Assuming the stack operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with an average fluoride emission rate of 0.008 gram per second (1.5 pounds per day), the average fluoride concentration at the nearest site boundary was estimated to be 0.7 $\mu g/m^3$. There is no Oklahoma air standard for HF, but this concentration

is less than the 24-hour atmospheric HF limit of 5 $\mu g/m^3$ applicable in some states.

Surface water quality is protected by enforcing release limits and monitoring programs as required under the National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Annual average concentrations of parameters regulated by the NPDES permit have been below discharge limits established for the liquid effluent outfall to the Arkansas River and are expected to remain below the discharge limits. Discharges are not expected to have significant impact on the surface water quality in the Arkansas River because of the dilution volume in the river.

Previous operation of the plant has resulted in localized chemical and radiological contamination of groundwater of the shallow aquifer in several locations. By license amendment dated March 25, 1997, Fansteel committed to operation of a groundwater collection and treatment system which will reduce the concentration of chemical constituents to levels that can be discharged via the outfall.

No impacts are expected on land use, biotic resources, or cultural resources. A small positive socioeconomic impact is expected through the employment of 30 people at the site.

Accident Conditions

The handling, processing, and storage of material containing radioactive constituents at the Fansteel facility could result in an uncontrolled release of radioactive material to the environment if there was an accident. However, the relatively small quantities and low concentrations of the radioactive constituents are factors which constrain the impacts of potential accidents. The NRC staff selected the following representative accidents scenarios for evaluation: (1) A spill of contaminated soil, (2) a large-scale leak of untreated contaminated groundwater, and (3) a failure of the pond residue processing off-gas equipment.

The NRC staff evaluated radiological impacts for each accident scenario by determining the CEDE to the maximally exposed individual. The estimated CEDE was 1.0×10^{-6} Sv (0.1 mrem) for the spill of contaminated soil, 2.1×10^{-10} Sv (2.1×10^{-5} mrem) for the spill of groundwater, and 3.8×10^{-6} Sv (0.38 mrem) for the failure of the off-gas treatment equipment. Therefore, the potential consequences for each accident scenario pose an insignificant risk to the public.

Agencies and Persons Consulted

Several people from the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (OKDEQ) were consulted concerning this proposed amendment, including Earlon Shirley, Waste Management Division, Radiation Management Section; Mark Thomason, Water Quality Division; and David Dimick, Air Quality Division.

Conclusion

The NRC has determined that the issuance of the amendment to allow Fansteel to process the calcium fluoride wastewater treatment residues concurrently with the WIP residues will not result in significant impact to human health or the environment.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The Commission has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) related to the amendment of Source Material License SNM–911. On the basis of the assessment, the Commission has concluded that environmental impacts that would be created by the proposed action would not be significant and do not warrant the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. Accordingly, it has been determined that a Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate.

For further details with respect to this action, the EA, the licensee's renewed license dated September 30, 1997, the amendment application dated July 30, 1997, and related documents are available for public inspection and copying at the Commission's Public Document Room at the Gelman Building, 2120 L Street NW, Washington, DC. Questions should be referred to NRC's Project Manager for the Fansteel, Inc., facility, Susan D. Chotoo, at (301) 415–8102 or sdc@nrc.gov.

Dated at Rockville, Maryland, this 9th day of December 1997.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Walter S. Schwink,

Acting Chief, Licensing Branch, Division of Fuel Cycle Safety and Safeguards, NMSS.

[FR Doc. 97–32621 Filed 12–12–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 7590–01–P

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION

Interest Assumption for Determining Variable-Rate Premium; Interest Assumptions for Multiemployer Plan Valuations Following Mass Withdrawal

AGENCY: Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

ACTION: Notice of interest rates and assumptions.

SUMMARY: This notice informs the public of the interest rates and assumptions to be used under certain Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation regulations. These rates and assumptions are published elsewhere (or are derivable from rates published elsewhere), but are collected and published in this notice for the convenience of the public. Interest rates are also published on the PBGC's home page (http://www.pbgc.gov).

DATES: The interest rate for determining the variable-rate premium under part 4006 applies to premium payment years beginning in December 1997. The interest assumptions for performing multiemployer plan valuations following mass withdrawal under part 4281 apply to valuation dates occurring in January 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Harold J. Ashner, Assistant General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, 1200 K Street, NW., Washington, DC 20005, 202–326–4024. (For TTY and TDD, call 800–877–8339 and request connection to 202–326–4024.)

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Variable-Rate Premiums

Section 4006(a)(3)(E)(iii)(II) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) and § 4006.4(b)(1) of the PBGC's regulation on Premium Rates (29 CFR part 4006) prescribe use of an assumed interest rate in determining a single-employer plan's variable-rate premium. The rate is the ''applicable percentage'' (described in the statute and the regulation) of the annual yield on 30-year Treasury securities for the month preceding the beginning of the plan year for which premiums are being paid (the ''premium payment year''). The yield figure is reported in Federal Reserve Statistical Releases G.13 and H.15.

For plan years beginning before July 1, 1997, the applicable percentage of the 30-year Treasury yield was 80 percent. The Retirement Protection Act of 1994 (RPA) amended ERISA section 4006(a)(3)(E)(iii)(II) to provide that the applicable percentage is 85 percent for plan years beginning on or after July 1, 1997, through (at least) plan years beginning before January 1, 2000.

However, under section 774(c) of the RPA, the application of the amendment is deferred for certain regulated public utility (RPU) plans for as long as six months. The applicable percentage for RPU plans will therefore remain 80 percent for plan years beginning before