



State of Utah

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Environmental Quality

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DEQ uses a statistical analysis to test depleted uranium

Salt Lake City, Utah – The Division of Radiation Control (DRC) on Tuesday initiated the sampling of the depleted uranium at EnergySolutions' low-level radioactive waste disposal facility, using a federally-accepted statistical approach to determine whether the waste meets the safety hazards set by the state.

Sampling will continue next week, weather permitting, said Amanda Smith, executive director of the Utah Department of Environmental Quality. At the request of Governor Herbert, Smith directed DRC staff to conduct its own tests of the depleted uranium that the Department of Energy (DOE) shipped to Utah in December from its Savannah River, South Carolina cleanup.

It's a highly laborious process, said Smith. Samplers pop the lid off the 55-gallon drums, and skim 250 grams of the depleted uranium, a powder substance, into a container. The samples are randomly taken from 171 of the 5,400 drums and will be sent to Eberline Services, Inc. in Oakridge, Tenn. for analysis, which will take a couple of weeks to a month to complete.

"We believe that given the questions raised about the nature of this waste, the state should do its due diligence and perform additional testing to assure with statistical confidence that the 5,400 drums do not exceed federal or state standards for radioactivity," said Smith.

Dane Finerfrock, director of DRC, said DEQ is using an Environmental Protection Agency method under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) that determines the number of samples for a statistical approach to find out whether the waste concentrations exceed EnergySolutions' Class A license.

Depleted uranium is classified as Class A low-level waste by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission but becomes more hazardous over time, up to 1 million years. Depleted uranium consists of many isotopes, including technetium-99, that if concentrations are too high would be prohibited under state law. The Radiation Control Board is currently completing a rule-making that would place specific conditions on depleted uranium disposal.

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“We have reviewed the shipping documents and the analytical results from the generator and have no reason to believe at this time that waste exceeds the Class A limits. At the Governor’s request DRC is conducting an independent analysis, and we have chosen a much more conservative and thorough approach to sampling.”

Governor Herbert stopped the Energy Department from shipping additional trainloads of depleted uranium from Savannah River under an agreement he negotiated with DOE earlier this week. The Energy Department also agreed to take the depleted uranium back if testing shows the material exceeds the Class A limit.

For more information, visit: <http://www.deq.utah.gov/Issues/hottopics/depleteduraniumtest.htm>.

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