

EPA to revise permit associated with aquifer pump test at Weld County (Colo.) uranium site

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New permit to specify water pressure requirement and clarify issues noted in petitions

(Denver, Colo. – February 7, 2011) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will revise and reissue a permit authorizing Powertech, USA, to re-inject water as part of an aquifer pump test at the proposed Centennial uranium recovery site in Weld County, Colo. The new draft Underground Injection Control (UIC) Class V permit will include a specific water pressure requirement for reinjection that was inadvertently not included in a permit EPA issued last December.

“EPA will remedy this oversight and clarify this permit with full transparency and public involvement,” said Steve Tuber, EPA’s assistant regional administrator in Denver. “We will issue a new draft permit that maintains specific and rigorous requirements to ensure the protection of groundwater.”

EPA issued a final Class V UIC permit to Powertech in December 2010 following a year-long public review and comment process. Since that time, EPA’s Environmental Appeals Board (EAB), an independent board that oversees EPA permitting actions, has received two petitions for review of the final permit. The EAB has asked EPA to file a response addressing the petitioners’ contentions.

After reviewing the petitions, EPA has decided to withdraw, revise and reissue the permit. This decision is based on a petitioner’s issue noting that the final permit did not specify that Powertech is required to not exceed zero pressure at the wellhead when re-injecting water from the pump test. While EPA has clearly stated its intent to require this condition, and Powertech has agreed to comply, this requirement was inadvertently not included in the final permit. The maintenance of zero pressure at the wellhead is important as it helps ensure that the re-injection activity will not cause movement of water between aquifers beyond that which is naturally occurring.

EPA intends to issue a new draft permit within the next several weeks that specifically requires that Powertech not exceed a Maximum Allowable Injection Pressure (MAIP) of zero at the wellhead. EPA will also clarify language in the permit to address additional concerns noted in the petitions. Upon issuing the new draft permit, EPA will initiate a public review and comment period.

This UIC Class V permit is limited to groundwater re-injection. Specifically, the permit will enable Powertech to re-inject water taken from a sandstone aquifer within the Fox Hills formation during an aquifer pump test in which groundwater will be placed in holding tanks and re-injected, unaltered, into the same aquifer. The test is designed to provide information about hydrogeology at the Centennial site and inform the feasibility of any future in-situ uranium extraction activities. Conditions of the aquifer pump test itself are subject to prior approval by the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety.

This UIC permit does not allow for the removal or processing of uranium or the disposal of waste water at the project site. Such activities would be subject to additional EPA and State permit(s). Any future UIC permit applications will be subject to an extensive public review process, including access to technical information, public meetings and comment periods consistent with applicable laws and regulations.

The State of Colorado is an Agreement State under the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s regulations for uranium in-situ leaching facilities and has authority for the licensing and operation of uranium extraction activities.

Related documents can be found at: <http://www.epa.gov/region8/water/uic/>

EPA regulations under 40 CFR part 124 describe the public review process for UIC permitting actions. General information about the UIC program can be found at: <http://water.epa.gov/type/groundwater/uic/>

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