

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Public Interest Groups to Energy Department: Take Back Too-Hot Nuclear Waste**

*New report shows reprocessed uranium shipment runs afoul of state and Federal laws; groups ask DOE to put science and safety ahead of political expediency*

*Salt Lake City, Utah – March 3, 2010* – The Department of Energy (DOE) should immediately take back a controversial shipment of 5,000 drums of reprocessed uranium waste sent to Utah late last year, according to public interest groups.

The groups—the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah (HEAL Utah) and the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER)—jointly released a report detailing how the shipment violates state and Federal nuclear waste laws.

The report was originally provided to Utah Governor Gary Herbert on February 16, just days before the Governor negotiated an agreement in Washington D.C. with DOE officials to cancel two trainloads of reprocessed uranium from South Carolina, which had been scheduled for disposal in Utah.

The report's most startling finding: a large number of drums likely violate Utah's ban on hotter forms of nuclear waste, known as Class B and C waste. Based on an analysis of DOE sampling records, prepared by statistician Dr. Harry Chmelynski, the report shows that the radionuclide technetium-99 (Tc-99) can be expected with high confidence to exceed Utah's Class A limit in between 680 and 5,600 drums of DOE's reprocessed uranium stockpile. Tc-99 is a man-made radionuclide that results from the fissioning of nuclear fuel in a reactor, part of the process used to make plutonium for nuclear bombs.

But the concern about Tc-99 is only one of several problems with the shipment. "This waste crosses the line in three different ways; its disposal as Class A waste would violate state and federal regulations. Therefore, it should be sent back to Savannah River Site forthwith," said Dr. Arjun Makhijani, President of IEER and principal author of the report. The report shows that the reprocessed uranium stockpile exceeds by 300 times the amount of uranium considered for disposal under Federal low-level waste rules. And because the reprocessed uranium contains a cocktail of regulated and unregulated radioisotopes, it cannot be considered Class A under current law.

"Other Federal and State agencies are busy amending their regulations to make sure depleted uranium is disposed of safely, and the DOE tried to pre-empt these new health and safety standards by sending their waste here before new protections go into effect," said Vanessa Pierce, Executive Director of the public interest group HEAL Utah. "This controversy illustrates how problematic it is that our country lacks a cohesive nuclear waste policy. And although right now it's Utah's problem, it's quickly going to become one for Secretary Chu's Blue Ribbon Commission."

The groups hope to meet with DOE officials later this year to air their concerns. In the meantime, DOE should take back the waste, they said. "If the DOE is going to deal in good faith with the state of Utah from this point forward, taking back these 5,000 drums now would be a good first step," said Christopher Thomas, HEAL Utah Policy Director.

For further information, contact:

Vanessa Pierce – HEAL Utah (801) 364-5110 office (801) 652-5151 mobile  
or Bob Schaeffer – IEER (239) 395-6773

###