

**Public Involvement Plan for the Environmental  
Assessment of Ground Water Compliance Activities at  
the Uranium Mill Tailings Site, Falls City, Texas**

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Prepared for  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Albuquerque Operations Office  
Grand Junction Office

Prepared by  
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## **Public Involvement Plan for the Environmental Assessment of Ground Water Compliance Activities at the Uranium Mill Tailings Site, Falls City, Texas**

This Public Involvement Plan is tiered to the Uranium Mill Tailings Remedial Action (UMTRA) Ground Water Project Public Participation Plan dated October 1997. This public involvement plan is specific to the Falls City, Texas, site and details the activities that will be or have been carried out to meet the public participation requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978, as amended.

The objectives of this plan are to promote stakeholder awareness, understanding, and participation in the project decision-making processes; to maintain a proactive public affairs program that accurately identifies public and media concerns and provides timely information; and to establish stakeholder involvement and information activities to promote communication between the U.S. Department of Energy's Grand Junction Office (DOESGJO) and affected stakeholders to accomplish the project mission successfully and in a mutually satisfactory manner.

### **History**

In 1978, public concern about potential human health and environmental effects of uranium mill tailings led Congress to pass the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act (42 U.S.C. 7901 *et seq.*). In the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act, Congress acknowledged the potentially harmful health effects associated with uranium mill tailings and designated 24 inactive uranium-ore processing sites for cleanup (see Figure 1). These sites are located in 10 states; 23 of the sites are in states west of the Mississippi River. Of those, four sites are on Native American-owned lands.

In 1983, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed standards to protect the public and the environment from potential radiological and nonradiological hazards at abandoned processing sites. These standards included exposure limits for surface contamination and proposed compliance options for ground-water contamination. The ground-water standards were finalized in 1995. DOE is responsible for bringing surface and ground-water contaminant levels at the 24 sites into compliance with EPA standards. DOE is accomplishing this through the UMTRA Surface Project and the UMTRA Ground Water Project.

Under the UMTRA Surface Project, DOE has been cleaning up surface contamination since 1983. The second phase of the UMTRA Project is to meet ground-water standards at the 24 mill sites; thus, the UMTRA Ground Water Project was established. Project management for the UMTRA Ground Water Project was transferred to DOE-GJO during fiscal year 1996.

Figure 1. Locations of the Former Uranium-Ore Processing Sites



## **Responsibilities**

The GJO Technical Assistance and Remediation (TAR) contractor's Public Affairs Specialist, UMTRA Ground Water Project Site Manager, and NEPA Coordinator are responsible for identifying the need for, and for proposing the scope and content of, public informational materials and activities. Those individuals are also responsible for developing appropriate plans to establish and maintain communication, identifying and resolving issues of concern to stakeholders, supporting DOESGJO in the implementation of these plans, and evaluating the success of the communication programs. The TAR Public Affairs Specialist may request assistance from the Facility Operations and Support contractor's Public Affairs Specialist in accomplishing these tasks.

## **Project Implementation**

In 1992, DOE prepared a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the UMTRA Ground Water Project. Nineteen public scoping meetings were conducted between November 1992 and April 1993. A 120-day public comment period followed the issuance of the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. The final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement was distributed to the public in December 1996. The Record of Decision was issued in April 1997.

The Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement presents analyses of the potential impacts of four alternatives for implementing the UMTRA Ground Water Project: the proposed action, no action, active remediation to background levels, and passive remediation. The Record of Decision identifies the preferred alternative that will become the programmatic foundation for conducting the UMTRA Ground Water Project at all 24 sites. Under the proposed action alternative, three ground-water compliance strategies are presented to meet the EPA standards and may be selected for a given site: no remediation, passive remediation with natural flushing and monitoring activities, and active remediation. The EPA may select one strategy or a combination of strategies to meet the standards for a site.

The Baseline Risk Assessment, completed in January 1996, was used to determine if contaminated ground water at the Falls City site posed an immediate risk to human health and the environment. The Site Observational Work Plan for Falls City, which was completed in May 1997, characterized the site ground-water conditions and documented how DOE will demonstrate compliance with EPA ground-water standards. The Site Observational Work Plan suggested the implementation of supplemental standards because ground water in the uppermost aquifer meets the definition of limited-use ground water.

To comply with the requirements of NEPA, an Environmental Assessment was prepared and identified the proposed ground-water compliance strategy and alternatives to be used at the Falls City site. This public involvement plan fulfills a NEPA requirement that the public be encouraged to participate in the preparation of the final Environmental Assessment.

For information on the specific NEPA public participation requirements, refer to section 8.0 of the UMTRA Ground Water Public Participation Plan.

### **Public Participation Activities**

A variety of public participation activities were performed in relation to the Falls City, Texas, site. Public comments from the 19 public scoping meetings held in 1992 and 1993 with interested stakeholders were included in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. In September 1996, an UMTRA Ground Water workshop was held and attended by representatives from the State of Texas and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The State of Texas is presently reviewing the Site Observational Work Plan completed in May 1997. On June 30, 1997, a public meeting was held in Falls City to discuss the ground-water project and the proposed ground-water compliance strategy.

[Table 1](#) provides detailed information on the upcoming public participation activities for the Environmental Assessment at the Falls City site.

### **Information Contacts**

Requests for information should be directed to the DOE UMTRA Ground Water Project Manager or Site Manager listed below. A toll-free hotline (1-800-399-5618) has been established to provide information and to take public comments. In addition, the DOESGJO Home Page has information relevant to the UMTRA Ground Water Project. The home page address is <http://www.doegjpo.com>.

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Table 1. Scheduled Public Participation Activities for the Environmental Assessment (EA) of Ground Water Compliance Activities at the Uranium Mill Tailings Site, Falls City, Texas

Activities	Timing
DOE approval	November 26, 1997
Review of Final Draft by the State of Texas	December 2, 1997
Notification of EA availability via <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News Release</li> <li>• Federal Register notice (not required)</li> </ul>	December 22, 1997
Transmit final draft EA to interested stakeholders, other agencies, public (upon request)	December 22, 1997
Place copies of EA in public locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mesa County Library</li> <li>• Falls City Library</li> <li>• DOESGJO Reading Room</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>	December 22, 1997-January 1, 1998
Hold Public Meetings	As Needed
Comments received from stakeholders	January 9, 1998
Comments addressed	January 12-16, 1998
News release of Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) approval	February 9, 1998
Final EA and FONSI issued to the public, stakeholders, and agencies	February 9-13, 1998
Place copies of EA in public locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mesa County Library</li> <li>• Falls City Library</li> <li>• DOESGJO Reading Room</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>	February 9-13, 1998