

USEC security staff reductions draw criticism

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A United States Enrichment Corporation worker has voiced safety concerns in response to security changes at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

The changes include layoffs this month of an unspecified number of security personnel, as well as a decision not to staff the security checkpoint on the plant access road beginning next week, USEC public affairs manager Georgann Lookofsky said.

"It's really part of the overall process of shutting down," she said. "Many things have changed since we ceased enriching uranium in May of 2013."

USEC announced in January that no more than 110 workers would be laid off this month. Lookofsky declined comment on how many of the workers are security officers.

"Security officers will be laid off in February, but we will continue to have a sizable contingent of really well-trained security officers on staff and working," she said.

The Department of Energy reservation consists of about 3,500 acres, 750 of which are fenced and considered a controlled access area. Staffing of that area will continue, and special access or an escort will still be required for entry, Lookofsky said.

She said the Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved the changes, and the DOE agreed with them. The current rules that prohibit trespassing on the DOE reservation will remain in place, and signs won't be taken down.

USEC security worker John Driskill said these measures aren't enough. He said he understands the layoffs, but disagrees with the decision to leave the checkpoint unmanned.

"I think they're cranking the security down too far. People will be able to walk and drive right up to the security fence," he said.

Driskill, who says he's been involved with plant security for 26 years, said there are still workers and dangerous materials at the site. He called the elimination of staff at the checkpoint an unnecessary risk to workers and the general public.

"It's a drop in the Pacific Ocean of their budget, but the impact on the safety and security of that place is great," he said.

"That checkpoint has actually deterred a lot of problems from coming to us. We've been able to identify them before they were right in our laps. ... Without the checkpoint, there's nothing to give early warning, and no deterrents at all."

Lookofsky said many other key security controls will remain in place to protect nuclear material, classified material and information, and the plant's physical and proprietary assets.

"The determination has been made that some controls can be changed and the site will still be safe," she said.