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Security workers renew plea for revised rules at USEC upgrade of security

The request was made in light of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, although the Paducah plant involves low-level radiation.

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Security officer union leaders at the Paducah uranium enrichment plant have again asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to upgrade security rules to better protect the plant, this time in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorism.

John Driskill, governmental and public affairs officer for Local 111 of Security Police and Fire Professionals of America, wrote NRC Chairman Richard Meserve last week seeking the upgrade.

The commission is doing a "top to bottom" review of all plants under NRC regulation, said spokesman Jan Strasma. The commission will look for potential vulnerability and determine changes needed, Strasma said.

He said commission officials have Driskill's letter and have spoken with him twice by phone. "Certainly, we will be considering his view as part of our thorough review of security requirements of the (Paducah plant) as well as other nuclear facilities, but we have not yet formally responded to him."

Driskill and Jay Stoll, the new union president, want the NRC to reconsider its rejection of a March 2000 union request to upgrade security requirements.

"... what it would've meant would be to increase our capabilities to detect, respond to, prevent and mitigate circumstances of sabotage or terrorist attack or other violence," Driskill said. "... We think it was a mistake and we need the capability to do that."

The plant enriches uranium for use in nuclear fuel. Because its low-level radiation poses a lesser risk than nuclear power plants, NRC and Department of Energy regulations require only unarmed personnel watching the Paducah facility.

The union sought help from the Kentucky congressional delegation, which secured legislation in fall 1998 mandating arming and arrest authority at the plant. But it took until last spring for parts of the legislation to be clarified by DOE and ultimately by USEC Inc., the plant operator.

"If it hadn't been for the political intervention of Sen. (Mitch) McConnell and Congressman (Ed) Whitfield through legislation, I feel very strongly that we'd have been sitting out there on Sept. 11 without any weapons whatsoever," Driskill said.

Last month, Stoll replaced Driskill, who resigned as president to take a less demanding role with the 35-member union. Stoll said security issues and upcoming contract negotiations are chief concerns of the membership. The union's five-year contract expires March 1.
