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Nuclear regulators find no red flags on SHINE project

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NEIL JOHNSON
June 10, 2015



GAZETTE ARCHIVES

JANESVILLE—Federal officials say SHINE Medical Technologies could be within four to six months of getting approval to build a medical radioisotope production facility in Janesville.

So far, officials said, the company's project has raised no major regulatory red flags.

At two public sessions Wednesday at Rotary Gardens in Janesville, officials from the federal Nuclear Regulatory

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SHINE founder and CEO Greg Piefer shows off a full-sized version of his company's particle accelerator, which he plans to use in Janesville to manufacture medical isotopes.

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Commission boiled down a preliminary environmental impact review and safety evaluation of SHINE's construction plans for its proposed, \$100-million facility along Highway 51 east of the Southern Wisconsin Regional Airport.

The NRC's preliminary **review** detailed in part a 400-page report released in late May, identified no major risks to the environment or the public safety linked to SHINE's plan.

The NRC says the most serious factor, which the review categorized as "moderate" risk, would be an increase in highway traffic linked to construction of SHINE's facility and transport trucks coming and going once the facility is operating.

SHINE's Janesville facility would operate with a set of eight particle accelerators using radioactive, low-enriched uranium to produce the medical imaging radioisotope Molybdenum 99.

Mo-99 is used in injections to illuminate bone and other body tissue in more than 50,000 medical tests a day across the U.S.

The material is in shortage because the world's main producers of Mo-99—a few companies in Canada, Europe and South Africa—are tapering off production as the aging, high-enriched uranium reactors they use face government decommissioning.

Wednesday's sessions served as a forum for residents to register public comment on the project.

The NRC is accepting written comments until July 6.

Those comments will be rolled into the NRC's environmental and safety review, and the review will be referred to an independent federal review panel of radioisotope industry analysts and scientists in late July.

That panel will return recommendations and suggested changes to SHINE's facility plan to the NRC and SHINE. The NRC will then make a final decision on whether to allow SHINE to move forward with construction.

The decision is expected to come sometime between October and

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early 2016, the NRC says.

Only one Janesville resident, Billy McCoy, commented at the afternoon session Wednesday. He questioned the safety of a radioactive production facility being built near the county airport, where air traffic comes and goes constantly.

Al Adams, the NRC's research chief for nuclear reactor testing, told The Gazette on Wednesday that part of the safety and transportation review was to determine whether the layout of runways and the direction of air traffic landing and taking off would pose risks to SHINE.

The plant is laid out roughly parallel to runways at the airport across the highway.

He said other small-scale radioactive accelerator facilities in the U.S. are near airports, including one near a U.S. Air Force base in San Diego.

Adams said safety of the facility is largely based on the facility's design and less on its surroundings.

SHINE's 15-foot-tall particle accelerators, which the company is now developing and testing using a prototype at its Monona headquarters, would be housed in water-cooled chambers under thick, concrete floors at the Janesville facility.

Approval for SHINE to use any of its accelerators is a separate regulatory process tied to an operating permit. NRC officials said the agency would review an operating application for SHINE pending construction approval.

That review could take up to two years, which would put SHINE on track to begin operations in Janesville in mid-2018.



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