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Tennessee report says NFS does not pollute Nolichucky River

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ERWIN Nuclear Fuel Services is touting a recently released report from the state that showed the company did not harm the nearby Nolichucky River.

NFS pretreats its wastewater to meet all regulatory standards prior to discharging into the Nolichucky River, and the (report) is proof ... that the company is not negatively impacting the river or those living downstream, NFS spokesman Tony Treadway said.

According to Treadway, NFS has a state-managed permit from the Environmental Protection Agency for the discharge of material into the river. The company sends process liquids to its wastewater facility, where they are treated as many times as necessary to meet regulations before they are released to the Nolichucky, he said.

We consistently on a very regular basis take samples of the water to make sure it meets all criteria before it is released, Treadway said.

Not all of NFS waste is eventually discharged into the Nolichucky. Treadway said restroom waste goes to the town's sewer system and solid wastes from the conversion of highly enriched uranium into a low-enriched form of the chemical are solidified and shipped to a licensed off-site disposal facility.

Erwin resident Chris Tipton said Wednesday that she asked at a meeting Monday about the report and whether it was safe to perform various recreational activities and eat the fish from the Nolichucky because it is downstream from the plant.

Tipton said the state will respond to her later but a NFS representative who was present told her it was safe.

Tipton said she learned the state does not monitor radionuclides in targeted rivers such as the Nolichucky unless it is asked.

Treadway said statistics from 2006 show the maximum dose a person might receive from drinking water from the Nolichucky over a year is 0.004 millirem. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission allows 25 millirems.

A problem in the Nolichucky that was cited in the January draft report from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation's Division of Water Pollution Control includes a loss of biological integrity because of siltation.

In other parts of the Nolichucky watershed, the report also noted suspended solids in Tate Springs and anthropogenic substrate alteration solids in Spring Creek, both of which flow in Unicoi County.

The report said the pollution for the Nolichucky River comes from an unidentified source in another state. It said a fish hatchery is the source of the solids in Spring Creek and Tate Springs.

NFS helped the town of Erwin mitigate nitrate pollution from fish hatchery operations by building a meandering stream through a biological area containing

trees and different plants to remove the nitrates in the waters of Tate Springs, Treadway said.

Treadway said he issued a newsrelease on the issue because he did not feel the media were giving adequate coverage to expert analysis.