

ECA Update: December 18, 2014



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Annual Washington DC Peer Exchange

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please join us February 12th and 13th for our annual Peer Exchange in the nation's capital, entitled "Communities Working With DOE." We've invited a number of Federal officials and elected representatives to take part, share their perspectives on the cleanup program, and interact with ECA members. This year, we'll gather in the Liaison Hotel in the heart of DC near Congress. Rooms are filling up fast so be sure to make your reservation before the cutoff date, January 22, 2015. We also have a small number of rooms available at our reduced rate for earlier in the week. Contact ECA staff if you'd like more information on those.

We'd like to thank our current sponsors, the Department of Energy, The Babcock and Wilcox Company, the Nuclear Energy Institute, AECOM, Exchange Monitor Publications and Forums, and Bechtel

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for helping to make this event possible.

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Beehan Speaks on Manhattan Project National Park

Former Oak Ridge Mayor and ECA Chair Tom Beehan was recently interviewed on the soon-to-be established Manhattan Project National Historical Park. President Obama signed the omnibus spending bill which includes \$21 million to establish the park at sites in Los Alamos, Richland, and Oak Ridge. Beehan noted that this park is important because it recognizes the work of all those who helped produce the atomic bombs that helped end World War II. It will also help educate people about a major project in our past that helped usher in the atomic age and so many of the nuclear innovations associated with it.

In response to the criticism of some who have said this park will only glorify nuclear weapons, Mayor Beehan eloquently noted that the history will be told fairly.

"There's two sides to this piece of the history," Mayor Beehan said as he explained that the National Park Service will be fair in its retelling of the Manhattan Project story. "There's no attempt to glorify war or the bomb, but it is part of our history. It changed the way that we lived because of what happened in Oak Ridge, Los Alamos, and Richland."

Mayor Beehan's interview can be heard in full [here](#).

Preserving Manhattan Project Sites

The New York Times

December 15, 2014

[LINK](#)

National parks have been set up for mountains, rivers, caves, rock formations, glaciers, forests, canyons, fossils, deserts, hot springs and volcanoes. Now, lawmakers have decided that the nation needs one for the atom bomb.

On Friday, the Senate joined the House in passing legislation to establish the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, memorializing the secretive World War II effort that involved some

of the world's top scientists and, in total, more than a half million Americans. The park will protect hundreds of surviving buildings and artifacts across three states -- New Mexico, Washington and Tennessee -- where the first bomb came to life 70 years ago.

The sites vary from the rustic home of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the project's scientific head, to a pioneering reactor that made nuclear fuel, to a large Quonset hut for bomb assembly.

The measure awaits President Obama's signature, which is expected this week.

Cynthia C. Kelly, president of the Atomic Heritage Foundation, a private group in Washington, D.C., said she had worked on the preservation plan for 15 years and was thrilled it had finally come to pass.

"It's hard to believe," she said in an interview. "This turned out to be the moment. It's rather amazing."

Among the sites to be preserved include an isolated cabin where grim scientific findings threw the secretive war effort into a panic.

Amid the seclusion of Los Alamos, N.M., scientists used the remote cabin as headquarters for a critical experiment to see if plutonium could fuel the bomb. Early in 1944, sensitive measurements showed that the silvery metal underwent a high rate of spontaneous fission - a natural process of atoms splitting in two.

The surprise finding meant the plutonium bomb would fail. Oppenheimer, the project's scientific head, considered resigning.

But he and his colleagues pressed ahead with a new design. Before dawn on July 16, 1945, the world's first atom bomb -- powered by a lump of plutonium about the size of a grapefruit -- lit up the New Mexico desert, its flash brighter than the sun.

SRNS begins spent fuel processing

The Aiken Standard

December 14, 2014

[LINK](#)

The Savannah River Site's operations and management contractor recently began a multi-year campaign to process aluminum-clad spent nuclear fuel.

The Savannah River Site's operations and management contractor recently began a multi-year campaign to process aluminum-clad spent nuclear fuel, or SNF, a material that is currently stored on site.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, or SRNS, started the campaign which is based on the SNF, also classified as Material Test Reactor. The fuel is made up of uranium, aluminum, fission products and actinides from both foreign and domestic research reactors.

The fuel is safely stored in wet storage and in H Canyon, it will undergo a chemical process that will separate the uranium and down blend the material into Low Enriched Uranium, a form no longer usable in nuclear weapons. The end-product will be available for use in commercial power reactors to generate electricity and the plutonium and fission products are transferred to the high level waste system where they are made into a glass waste form at the Defense Waste Processing Facility on site.

Bill Clifton, an SRNS senior advisor, said H Canyon's primary mission for years has been to separate the uranium from the SNF.

"We are taking this SNF and turning it into a product to be used to create clean energy," Clifton said. "The uranium is recovered and processed into a form that cannot be used for nuclear weapons, and this mission can only be completed here at SRS."

H Canyon was constructed in the 1950s and is the only hardened nuclear chemical separations plant still in operation in the U.S.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell and responsible for the management and operations at the Site.

Energy Secretary Moniz Announces Formation of Nuclear Energy Tribal Working Group

Department of Energy

December 12, 2014

[LINK](#)

WASHINGTON--Building on President Obama's commitment to strengthen the government-to-government relationship with Tribal Nations, Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz today announced the

formalization of the Nuclear Energy Tribal Working Group (NETWG), providing a forum for Tribal Leaders to engage with the Department on a wide scope of nuclear energy issues.

"Through the Nuclear Energy Tribal Working Group, the Department hopes to incorporate the unique and important perspectives from Tribal Leaders as we continue to develop and deploy safe, reliable, and efficient nuclear power," said Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz. "These types of partnerships help the Department to work more closely with the Tribal Nations on building a sustainable energy future and advance the President's all-of-the-above energy strategy."

The establishment of NETWG formalizes the efforts of the Nuclear Energy Tribal Leader Dialogue, established by the Office of Nuclear Energy (NE) in October 2013, which focused on topics such as the management of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste, to include transportation and related emergency response planning activities, nuclear research and development, small modular reactors, and potential economic business opportunities.

"I have been very pleased with the progress made in the Dialogue, which explored a number of critical nuclear energy matters that effect both Tribal Leaders and the development of this low-carbon resource," said Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy Pete Lyons. "I look forward to the next steps from this working group and further strengthening this important relationship in the years to come."

Through NETWG, the Office of Nuclear Energy will continue to support and encourage participation, coordination and consultation with Tribal Leaders in existing activities including the Department's National Transportation Stakeholder Forum. Tribal input and comments will provide valuable insights to NE in the planning stages for its nuclear programs. NE will coordinate the preparation, review, and implementation of NETWG's charter with Tribal Leaders participating in the Nuclear Energy Tribal Leader Dialogue.

ORNL contractor gets high marks, \$10.5M for FY2014

Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground

December 14, 2014

[LINK](#)

UT-Battelle, the partnership of the University of Tennessee and Battelle that has managed Oak Ridge National Laboratory since 2000, received high marks on its FY2014 report card and earned a total fee of about \$10.53 million (out of a maximum possible fee of \$11.2M).

In a Dec. 8 letter to ORNL Director Thom Mason, Department of Energy Site Manager Johnny Moore wrote: "I commend UT-Battelle for its performance over the past FY. I am confident in the strong scientific, technical, and management capabilities that ORNL possesses to address future DOE missions and operational goals. The coming year will continue to be a time of challenges. I look forward to partnering with you and your staff, to assure the achievement of DOE mission objectives."

Among other things, Moore lauded the lab's continuing leadership in scientific computing, materials research and climate-related studies.

While the lab's work in neutron sciences continues to be a strength, Moore noted the operational problems at the Spallation Neutron Source -- one of the key research facilities at ORNL.

"The Spallation Neutron Source had sustained operation at the design power of 1.4 megawatts, but premature target failure negatively impacted operations," the DOE official noted.

ORNL heads the nation's work on the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, and Moore gave the lab contractor good marks for that work.

"The U.S. ITER Project Office demonstrated excellent leadership, met all FY 2014 plan Level 1 and Level 2 milestones, and completed a Government Accountability Office review," he stated in his letter to Mason.

"UT-Battelle exceeded the DOE's expectations in providing leadership and stewardship of the laboratory," Moore wrote. "UT-Battelle's Laboratory Plan established a strong, realistic, and achievable vision for the Laboratory's future and DOE's mission accomplishment, and Laboratory management established a Science Advisory Board to provide scientific priority recommendations and ensure a well-informed and comprehensive perspective on the diverse activities of ORNL."

Moore noted that one of the challenges from the previous year was

to make continuing improvements in safety, and he said there were several "material handling incidents" during FY2014 -- including one that resulted in a serious injury to a lab worker.

Improvements are in the works, he said, adding, "It will take persistent focus to sustain improvements and UT -Battelle management is very engaged in driving this agenda."

He praised UT-Battelle for its work in managing the cost of doing business during tough fiscal times.

Hanford tanks continue to deteriorate

Yakima Herald

December 16, 2014

[LINK](#)

SPOKANE, Wash. -- A new report says underground nuclear waste storage tanks on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation continue to deteriorate.

The report was released Tuesday by the Government Accountability Office.

Hanford contains 177 nuclear waste tanks, many of which have leaked in the past. The wastes are left over from the production of plutonium for nuclear weapons.

The GAO report found that both the older single-walled tanks and newer double-walled tanks are deteriorating. Some of the tanks date back to the 1940s and have long passed their designed lifespan.

Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon says the U.S. Department of Energy must come up with a plan to deal with tanks that are leaking waste into the environment. Wyden is demanding a plan be produced in the next 90 days.

Fewer Los Alamos cleanup funds in budget bill

Lubbock Avalanche-Journal

December 13, 2014

[LINK](#)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- Recovery efforts stemming from a radiation leak at the nation's only underground nuclear waste repository could get a \$100 million boost in federal funding under a

budget measure pending in Congress.

The U.S. Senate was debating the \$1.1 trillion appropriations bill Friday, a day after it narrowly passed the House.

The measure also calls for cutting \$40 million for cleanup of long-term radioactive and hazardous waste at Los Alamos National Laboratory. The lab was on track to meet a major milestone this year for packing up and shipping tons of Cold War-era waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, or WIPP, before one of its containers ruptured and forced the indefinite closure of the repository.

The lab was pressured by Gov. Susana Martinez's administration to remove thousands of barrels of waste from outdoor storage by the summer.

That deadline came and went, and now hazardous waste cleanup efforts at Los Alamos and other U.S. Department of Energy facilities across the country are stalled thanks to WIPP's closure.

The New Mexico Environment Department said Friday it was disappointed with the latest budget proposal, saying previous cuts have weakened the lab over time and have kept environmental cleanup projects from moving more quickly.

"Another significant budget cut to LANL cleanup activities shows a lack of commitment on behalf of the federal government to protecting the safety of LANL workers and the people of New Mexico, and will almost certainly subject the federal government to additional liability in the future as LANL continues to miss deadlines for completing legally obligated projects," Jim Winchester, a spokesman for the state agency, said in a statement issued Friday.

The proposed cleanup budget of \$185 million is more in line with what the lab was receiving for environmental work before the state's push. With WIPP closed and the cleanup of transuranic waste halted, the funding request was lowered.

Still, watchdog groups voiced concern that cutting Los Alamos' funding would send the wrong message.

"I would argue that the LANL contractor and WIPP contractor are the ones who need to be penalized and pay the fines," Don Hancock with the Southwest Information and Research Center told the Albuquerque Journal.

The state last week proposed more than \$54 million in fines against the DOE and the contractors over the mishaps that forced WIPP's closure.

The DOE has expressed interest in negotiating with the state, and Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz has said reopening WIPP is a priority.

The budget bill includes the Obama administration's original funding request of \$220 million for WIPP and tacks on another \$100 million for remediation work necessitated by the radiation leak.

DOE officials have estimated it could take years and cost more than a half-billion dollars to reopen the nuclear waste repository.

"Getting the extra money for recovery at WIPP is absolutely critical," said Jennifer Talhelm, a spokeswoman for U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M. The senator has said opening the facility is key to getting cleanup back on track at Los Alamos and elsewhere.