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NRC Finalizes Yucca Mountain Safety Report, Finds Repository Safe

ECA Staff
January 29, 2015

Today, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) finalized its safety evaluation report (SER) on the proposed nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain in Nye County, Nevada. Volumes 2 and 5 of the SER deal with the safety of the repository before permanent closure and the conditions the Department of Energy would have to meet to obtain NRC approval, including outstanding land and water rights.

"Combined with previous reports, the science is clear that Yucca Mountain would meet all safety requirements related to radiation," said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., in a written statement. "There is no reason Congress shouldn't make Yucca Mountain part of the

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solution to end the stalemate on nuclear waste -- paving the way for nuclear power to be a larger source of the clean, cheap, reliable electricity we need to power our 21st-century economy."

Sen. Alexander chairs the Senate's Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee.

Republicans in both chambers are expected to appropriate more funds for the Yucca project and consider legislation dealing with high level nuclear waste in the coming months.

The full SER can be found [here](#).

Sue Cange to head Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management

DOE EM

January 29, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to announce that Sue Cange has accepted the position of manager of the Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. In this position, Sue is responsible for successfully managing the cleanup of three Manhattan-era sites including the former K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and the Y-12 National Security Complex.

Sue is a highly-skilled, intelligent leader with a tremendous amount of experience and insight into Oak Ridge's cleanup mission. Sue brings more than 27 years of federal experience to the position, and she has a long and proven record of leadership through her service with a number of Department of Energy programs, including Environmental Management, Nuclear Energy, and Assets Utilization. Sue has the ability to develop and accomplish ambitious cleanup strategies and foster results-driven relationships with a large range of stakeholders on complex issues.

I would like to thank Sue for her time and commitment serving as the acting manager since May 2014. During this time, she and the EM staff there made significant strides in Oak Ridge's cleanup portfolio. I am very excited to have Sue permanently join the EM leadership team, and I look forward to her continuing progress at one of the most important sites in the complex.

Please join me in supporting and congratulating Sue on her new position.

Sincerely,

Mark Whitney

Moniz reportedly pleased with UPF progress

Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground

January 28, 2015

[LINK](#)

In a message to federal employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration's Production Office, NPO Manager Steve Erhart passed along positive feedback on work taking place on the Uranium Processing Facility.

According to the memo from Erhart, he met earlier this month with Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, NNSA Administrator Frank G. Klotz, Deputy Administrator Madelyn Creedon, as well as Uranium Czar Tim Driscoll and UPF Federal Project Director John Eschenberg.

The meeting was reportedly to "brief the secretary on the work we are doing on the Enriched Uranium Strategy which includes the UPF redesign efforts currently underway," Erhart said in the message.

" The Secretary definitely liked the construct and the progress that is being made," Erhart reported. "He particularly liked the risk-reduction activities here at Y-12 (which were our idea and endorsed by the 'Red Team') that several of you are intimately involved with. It is great for Y-12 and the NNSA that this is now heading in a positive direction."

UPDATE: Idaho Nuclear Waste Treatment Plant Passes Test

Magic Valley

January 20, 2015

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A glitch-prone treatment facility in eastern Idaho has successfully completed a major test in which radioactive liquid waste was converted to solid form, federal officials say.

The U.S. Department of Energy said workers ran 58,000 gallons of a test liquid through the \$571 million Integrated Waste Treatment Unit at the Idaho National Laboratory.

"The team is extremely excited about the fact that we've demonstrated that this process actually can work," Curtis Roth, an agency deputy manager who oversees the treatment unit, told the Post Register in a story Monday.

Roth made the comments at a recent meeting of the Idaho National Laboratory Site Environmental Management Citizens Advisory Board.

Roth said the test demonstrated that the process of turning 900,000 gallons of radioactive waste into a solid form can work. The high-level radioactive waste came from processing spent nuclear fuel from U.S. Navy ships and is stored in tanks at the Idaho National Laboratory.

Earlier this month, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality said it would fine the Department of Energy \$3,600 a day for missing a Dec. 31 deadline to remove the waste from the 50-year-old tanks.

The fear is that nuclear waste could seep into the huge Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer that provides water to much of the agriculture industry in the state.

The nuclear facility also has a second violation concerning a 1995 agreement Idaho made with the federal agency. It involves waste that is now stuck in an Idaho underground nuclear repository because a site in southern New Mexico is not taking shipments of low-level waste due to recent mishaps.

Last week, former Idaho Govs. Phil Batt and Cecil Andrus said current Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter is turning the state into a nuclear waste repository by recently allowing the Department of Energy to bring 50 spent nuclear fuel rods into the Idaho National Laboratory for research.

The research could bring up to \$20 million a year for about five years to the lab, federal officials said.

Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden said the deal provides an incentive for the Department of Energy to abide by the 1995

agreement and remove nuclear waste from the facility. Those efforts are currently at a standstill.

If the federal agency doesn't take action to meet its obligation under the 1995 agreement, the state won't allow the 50 spent fuels rods into Idaho, Wasden said.

Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Warehouse Cleanup Finished, Work Continues on Clearing Soil Contamination

NPR

January 28, 2015

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LATA Environmental Services has finished cleanup at a warehouse at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant as the Department of Energy prepares to decommission the site.

The nearly 29,000 square foot space held equipment and materials from the facility. The cleanup project began in May 2014 and was accelerated after receiving additional federal funds early last year.

"Every week the team has exceeded the goal of safely removing, characterizing, and packaging the waste for shipment," Jerome Ellington, LATA's manager for much of the project, said in a press release.

Contractors say enough waste was removed to cover a high school basketball court piled six feet high.

LATA started work this month on treating groundwater contamination on two acres at the site with deep soil mixing, using an auger to mix the soil 60 feet down. Workers will then inject steam into the auger, evaporating and removing contaminants. Contractors say the cleanup will require 262 drillings.

IG identifies more than 200 high-risk facilities that are dirty and degraded; 'worst of worst' is at Y-12

Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground

January 28, 2015

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy's Inspector General has identified more than 200 high-risk buildings around the nuclear complex that are dirty and degraded and have no definitive schedule for cleanup, and

the "worst of the worst" is the Alpha-5 facility at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant in Oak Ridge.

The audit report released today by Inspector General Gregory Friedman found serious weaknesses in DOE's efforts to deal with these old and deteriorated facilities -- some of which have been out of operation for decades -- that loaded with radioactive and hazardous materials. The schedule for turning these facilities over to DOE's Environmental Management program for cleanup is getting pushed more and more into the future, the report said, indicating that many of these facilities won't be designated for cleanup until 2025 or possibly even a decade later.

Building 9201-5, also known as Alpha-5, is a former uranium-enrichment facility that dates back to the World War II Manhattan Project. The IG report said the National Nuclear Security Administration, the semi-independent part of DOE that oversees the nuclear weapons complex, had characterized Alpha-5 as "the worst of the worst" even though about \$24 million has already been spent to reduce risks at the big building. The reports notes that in addition to hazardous and radioactive contamination being spread by water from leaking roofs, there is a risk of explosion from materials housed there.

Here's an excerpt from the government's audit report regarding Alpha-5:

"This facility was built in 1944 and supported a number of missions that used materials such as uranium, mercury and beryllium. Since it ceased operations in 2005, this highly contaminated facility has experienced significant degradation. In particular, during a 2008 Environmental Management assessment, it was noted that the facility had substantial flooding, exterior piping and associated supports were corroding, and reinforced concrete roof panels had deteriorated. The assessment concluded that the combination of the large facility size, rapidly deteriorating conditions, and vast quantity of items requiring disposition made this facility one of the greatest liabilities in the Department's complex. Further compounding the issue, the facility houses a hub of utilities that serves operational production facilities at the site, which could affect national security mission work as further degradation occurs. Since this facility was evaluated in 2008, the site has spent more than \$24 million in operating and maintenance costs.

"To accelerate the cleanup effort, Environmental Management provided Recovery Act funding to NNSA to remove a portion of the legacy waste from the Alpha 5 Facility.

"However, since cleanup efforts were performed, officials informed us that the facility has degraded at an increasingly alarming rate. In particular, a 2014 NNSA site assessment indicated that roof degradation continues to be widespread throughout the facility with varying levels of severity. This has resulted in significant water intrusion and the spread of radiological and toxicological contamination.

"Additionally, the assessment identified the potential for an explosion or reaction associated with remaining contaminants and personnel safety issues related to the degraded condition as high-risk areas. Overall, the assessment concluded that this facility presents a high risk to the workers and environment and should not be accepted. The assessment noted that demolition remains the only viable risk-accepted standard. Further, it noted that funding will need to be diverted from mission work to prevent the realization of imminent risks and mitigate the consequences of realized risk events."

Savannah River Site clean up pushed to 2065, costing extra \$25 billion

The Augusta Chronicle
January 27, 2015

[LINK](#)

Cleanup of Savannah River Site's Cold War nuclear waste has been pushed back to fiscal year 2065, requiring an additional \$25 billion and more than two extra decades of work, according to latest projections from the U.S. Department of Energy.

New estimates add 23 years to the environmental management program at SRS, and the life cycle cost estimate has risen to between \$91 billion and \$109 billion, according to DOE.

Information on the delay was presented to the SRS Citizens Advisory Board this week. Board members said announcements of delays and cost overruns have become expected as the federal government faces tightening budgets.

Marolyn Parson, the chairwoman of the SRS Citizens Advisory Board, said the schedule delay puts workers and the environment at a greater risk from potential threats of nuclear materials at the site.

"It's disappointing. It seems every year we push the dates back farther and farther. All that does is keep the risks in place longer and longer," Parson said. "It's on and on. I don't know when it's going to stop."

Reduced federal funding levels for SRS have contributed to the changes, said Jim Giusti, a spokesman for DOE-SRS. The environmental management budget, which was about \$1.3 billion for fiscal 2015, allows for less work to be completed each year, he said.

The life cycle estimate analyzes several cleanup programs, including spent nuclear fuel processing, solid and liquid waste disposition and soil and groundwater remediation. It considers "assumptions" that would affect clean up, such as shipments from SRS to a permanent federal repository beginning in 2055, completion of the Salt Waste Processing Facility, and schedules for emptying and closing high-level liquid waste tanks.

"We are going to do as much as we can with the money we have. That means some of those (cleanup milestones) are going to get pushed back. When we look at risks to the public and our workers, which ones can we push out farther because they are less risk than say our high-level waste tanks," Giusti said.

SRS has 51 underground storage tanks, six of which are no longer in use, holding high-level radioactive waste. Some of the aging tanks are cracked, rusty or have leaked.

The projections can change if Congress budgets more money or the site saves money on some programs, Giusti said. He said programs have been prioritized to clean up those with the greatest risk first.

"There's always a risk when we delay work. I don't know it's any more a risk today than it would be a year from now," he said. "The things that are the most risk to the public and the environment we are going to get done first. That's our priority. We look at liquid waste as being the No. 1 risk at the site we have to deal with."

Tom Clements, the director of nuclear watchdog group SRS Watch, said it's important that SRS officials and politicians pressure the DOE to fully fund site cleanup.

"With the pressure on the DOE budget only increasing, it appears that the stage could be set for some work to never be adequately finished, raising the spectre that the site could become a national sacrifice zone," Clements said.

Whether cleanup is ever completed depends on future funding amid DOE budget constraints, Giusti said.

"It will depend on what the priorities of the nation are and in many cases, how much money do we get. None of us at Savannah River Site, meaning DOE and our contractors, want to drag this out. But we have to face the reality of the budget challenges that are facing the Department of Energy and Congress," Giusti said.

DOE to pay \$44,722 EPA penalty over Hanford waste storage

Tri-City Herald

January 28, 2015

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy has agreed to pay a \$44,722 penalty to resolve more violations of radioactive and hazardous chemical waste storage requirements at Hanford, as alleged by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The two agencies signed a consent agreement Wednesday, with DOE neither admitting nor denying violations. Money for Hanford cleanup will be returned to the U.S. Treasury.

The penalty follows \$136,000 DOE agreed to pay in 2013, also related to storing radioactive and hazardous chemical waste at Hanford. But DOE did not follow through on all the requirements that were part of that settlement, according to the EPA.

In 2013, EPA told DOE it needed to follow the same procedures required of private businesses that store waste. If storage is not used for more than a year, it must give notice to start closing the waste storage unit or request an extension to continue using it.

DOE then had waste stored in five areas inside and outdoors at T Plant in central Hanford, plus additional sites at the Central Waste Complex and near some burial trenches that EPA said had not been authorized for the storage of waste.

DOE agreed in 2013 to submit permit documents, including a closure plan, for the eight areas to another Hanford regulator, the Washington Department of Ecology, within 120 days. DOE submitted the plan by the deadline, but EPA found the plan did not include important elements.

It did not have a detailed description of how the waste would be moved and disposed of, or how the eight sites would be decontaminated, according to the agreement. It also did not specify the time for closing each area.

DOE now is working with Ecology to amend the plan to include required information.

In a second violation alleged by EPA, DOE is accused of moving 136 drums of waste from an area covered by a permit for storing the waste to an area where waste storage had not been approved.

The 55-gallon drums were stored outside the Effluent Treatment Facility in central Hanford and held powder with radioactive and hazardous chemical contaminants removed from wastewater at the plant.

Because workers inside the treatment facility could be exposed to radiation from the containers, they were moved to a nearby area that was not authorized for storage, essentially creating a new storage area without applying for a permit, according to EPA.

The drums were moved on April 30, 2013, when discussions about proper waste storage were underway for the settlement agreement reached in June 2013.

An inspection in August 2013 found them to be outside approved storage areas, according to EPA.

EPA said in 2013 that handling of radioactive and hazardous waste could not be done too carefully and that strict compliance with requirements was the only acceptable path.

The latest agreement is "part of a continuing process of improving compliance and communication with DOE's regulators," DOE said in a statement Wednesday. "We look forward to continued discussions with EPA on compliance and cleanup activities."