

ECA Update: September 10, 2015



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Nuke waste pressure builds for Idaho
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A nuclear waste showdown between Idaho and the U.S. Department of Energy has reached a new level.

The DOE has informed the state that if it does not accept a small amount of spent fuel from two commercial plants soon, it will be sent somewhere for research - and that research is seen as an

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economic boon for the Idaho National Laboratory.

Attorney General Lawrence Wasden has said the waste can't be delivered until 900,000 gallons of liquid radioactive waste already at INL is cleaned up. Kelsey Nunez, executive director of the Snake River Alliance, adds there are other implications to be considered if Idaho takes the spent fuel.

"There's 20 tons of this spent nuclear fuel at the North Anna power plant just waiting to go somewhere," she said. "If the research is done here, it's pretty likely the rest of the waste will come here too."

The North Anna plant is located in Virginia.

According to Nunez, there is currently no place for the waste to go after it is used for research, which she says is another reason Idaho should say "no." There also are arguments to support accepting the commercial waste, including that the contractor for cleanup and the research contractor are two different companies - so they shouldn't be tied together.

Nunez says the 1995 Settlement Agreement happened because of the federal government's legacy of "literally dumping all kinds" of nuclear waste in Idaho, putting land and water at risk. The practice angered Idahoans, and since there's still no place for high-level waste to go for long-term storage, Nunez says Idahoans should demand accountability.

"We don't think it's appropriate to bring commercial spent nuclear fuel in, whether it's for research or not," she said.

Nunez adds that progress on cleanup has been made at INL, but delays have occurred for safety reasons.

DOE Awards Contractors for the West Valley Demonstration Project Probabilistic Performance Assessment

EIN News

September 4, 2015

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Cincinnati – The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) today announced the award of a contract to Neptune and Company, Inc. for the WVDP-PPA procurement that will provide support to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP), and the New York State Energy Research and

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Development Authority (NYSERDA) in performing a probabilistic analysis to support the Phase 2 Decision making Alternative for the West Valley Demonstration Project and Western New York Nuclear Service Center. This is a Time-and-Material contract with an approximate value of \$4,300,000.00 with a base period of three years and one two-year option. Two proposals were received in response to this solicitation.

The work to be performed under the contract is to perform a probabilistic analysis for Phase 2 of the Phased Decision making Alternative that includes the following four elements: (1) perform sensitivity analyses to provide near-term direction to site data collection activities, (2) transition existing components of a deterministic performance assessment (PA) to a probabilistic modeling platform to identify changes necessary in the model structure, input parameter distribution, the need for additional data, or the need for different modeling approaches, (3) prepare a long term probabilistic PA to support decision making and meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), and (4) prepare chapters and appendices for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) as required by the SEIS Contractor. DOE and NYSERDA (the agencies) intend to conduct this work jointly, using a tripartite contract structure and sharing in oversight and cost of the work.

The mission of the DOE Environmental Management program is the safe cleanup of the environmental legacy resulting from five decades of nuclear weapons development and Government-sponsored nuclear energy research.

National Lab Reports Violations of Hazardous Waste Permit

AP: ABC News

September 5, 2015

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An extensive review at one of the nation's premier federal laboratories has turned up violations in how the lab handled hundreds of containers of radioactive waste over the past decade.

The latest revelations are on top of the permit violations Los Alamos National Laboratory first reported last year in the wake of a radiation release at the federal government's underground nuclear waste dump in southern New Mexico.

That release was caused by a container that had been

inappropriately packed at Los Alamos. The incident forced the indefinite closure of the repository, leaving in limbo the cleanup of decades' worth of plutonium-contaminated waste at defense sites around the country. The price tag for resuming operations at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is expected to top a half-billion dollars.

The lab reviewed more than 200 variations of the procedures that have been used between October 2005 and May 2014 to decontaminate about 10,000 containers of waste. The review found that some of the same procedural missteps made with the drum that leaked radiation were also made when handling more than 1,000 other containers.

But Lab Director Charlie McMillan and U.S. Department of Energy Los Alamos Field Office Manager Kimberly Davis Lebak said in a letter sent this week to the New Mexico Environment Department that the containers highlighted in the latest review were different than the drum that leaked radiation.

"Our staffs have completed a technical evaluation of these non-compliances and concluded that they do not present a credible safety concern to workers or the public and do not pose a threat to human health or the environment," they wrote.

Still, the lab's lack of compliance is a big concern for the state Environment Department, which oversees a permit that allows Los Alamos to handle hazardous waste. "The one thing I can say is we're going to continue to hold their feet to the fire on this," said Kathryn Roberts, director of the department's Resource Protection Division.

The corrective action Los Alamos is taking to address the problems related to the waste stream that resulted in the radiation leak will also cover the latest violations, Roberts said.

"It's going to address all those fundamental problems that stem from those procedures that were deficient in a lot of ways," she said. "Those are still going to be revised and we're going to have new processes in place and we're going to scrutinize those very, very closely."

The lab first notified the state of the latest violations during a meeting in July. The report released this week provides details.

Watchdog Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group pointed to the lab's history of noncompliance, saying outside observers would

disagree that there are not safety or environmental concerns.

Mello said the report indicates some waste was illegally treated, some contained incompatible chemicals such as organic cat litter and some may have been mislabeled as safe to handle.

Among the containers are more than 630 stored at Los Alamos, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant and another facility in west Texas in which mixed waste has been blended with concrete. The containers may include corrosive or ignitable materials, but officials say more tests need to be done on the contents.

The state recently settled with the federal government over the radiation release at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, but Mello said under the terms the state agreed not to enforce penalties against Los Alamos for compliance issues that are self-disclosed.

"This does not leave the state in a good place," he said, suggesting the contractor that runs the lab believes it is above the law.

Los Alamos lab "is too big and complicated for NMED (the New Mexico Environment Department) to regulate without a special enforcement squad," he said.

Janway: Plutonium has already been disposed at WIPP

Current Argus News

September 9, 2015

[LINK](#)

CARLSBAD >> A debate on whether weapon-grade plutonium should be disposed of at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant or should be made into nuclear fuel continues.

In response to a letter written by former New Mexico Gov. and U.S. Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson, Carlsbad Mayor Dale Janway responded with his own letter, stating that Richardson erred in his objections to the DOE's preference toward disposing the surplus plutonium at WIPP.

"The reality is that about 3 metric tons of down-blended weapons grade plutonium has already been disposed of at WIPP," Janway said. "As Bill Richardson knows, because it was completed while he was Secretary of Energy."

Janway explained that if down-blended properly, the nuclear waste

falls under the Waste Acceptance Criteria at WIPP.

Richardson wrote in his Aug. 21 letter to the U.S. Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid of Nevada that disposing of plutonium at WIPP is not the best alternative to the currently funded program called the "federal mixed oxide nuclear program."

The program, also known as MOX, turns plutonium into a nuclear fuel.

The cost to run the program has increased recently, which prompted the DOE to seek cost-effective alternatives.

One of them is to dispose of plutonium at WIPP.

Disposing of surplus plutonium is due to an agreement made by the U.S. with Russia in 2000 that states each country would dispose of 34 metric tons of weapon-grade plutonium.

If plutonium was sent for disposal to WIPP, the repository would first have to be reopened fully, a date that has yet to be announced after it was pushed back earlier this month from the previous early 2016 goal.

"WIPP remains closed, with no re-opening date," Richardson said in his letter, pointing out that considering the WIPP alternative isn't viable because it is still closed.

Richardson also added that WIPP would have to expand and its allowed waste profile would have to change.

Janway also stated in his letter that disposing of surplus plutonium at WIPP is not only a cost-effective alternative to MOX, but "dilution and disposal in a deep geologic repository is a safer, more permanent solution."

As a community that volunteered to host WIPP's existence, the unnecessary spending of taxpayer's money is unacceptable, Janway said.

"This community is proud to serve our country by reducing the environmental and proliferation risk from the production of nuclear weapons," he said.

State considering removing a portion of Hanford site from list of hazardous sites

AP: Daily Journal
September 9, 2015
[LINK](#)

RICHLAND, Washington — For the first time, the state of Washington is proposing to remove a portion of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation from its list of hazardous sites.

The portion is called the Hanford 1100 Area and covers 1.2 square miles.

Cleanup on the 1100 Area was among the earliest done and was completed under the federal Superfund program in 1996. The Tri-City Herald reports the cleanup included battery acid, paints and antifreeze, plus underground tanks holding antifreeze, gasoline and oil.

Now the state is considering removing the 1100 Area from its statewide list of hundreds of hazardous sites.

Hanford for decades made plutonium for nuclear weapons and now is engaged in cleaning up the nation's largest collection of nuclear waste.

DOE takes first steps toward a post-Yucca future

Greenwire
September 9, 2015

A Department of Energy team has begun crafting strategies for reaching out to communities that might accept and store nuclear waste.

"The team is actively developing plans and performing technical analysis of various components of an integrated waste management system, as well as evaluating the Department's next steps in the consent-based siting process," a DOE spokesman confirmed in an email.

The team was created as part of a plan outlined by the Obama administration two years ago that calls for creating a permanent geologic wastes repository by 2048. The plan's mum on the fate of the Yucca Mountain, Nev., nuclear waste repository.

The plan springs from recommendations released by President Obama's Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future in 2012. The 15-member panel -- which included then-MIT professor

and now-DOE chief Ernest Moniz -- was asked to find alternatives for storing more than 65,000 metric tons of nuclear waste after the administration declared Yucca Mountain unworkable.

The commission's report says U.S. waste policy needs to be revamped, regardless of Yucca, and called on the administration and Congress to quickly develop storage sites and dumps. It calls for a consent-based process for siting one or more temporary storage sites and geologic repositories ([E&ENews PM](#), Jan. 11, 2013).

So far, communities in Texas and New Mexico have offered to host temporary storage sites ([E&E Daily](#), June 19).

Moniz said earlier this year that DOE would soon begin identifying and vetting a defense-waste repository and separate sites for one or more interim facilities for old fuel from shuttered reactors, but he also made clear DOE would need congressional approval -- and more authority -- to build the facilities ([E&ENews PM](#), March 24).

Sources say the new DOE team is part of larger changes afoot at the department. DOE, they say, is also tasking other staffers to take closer look at managing used reactor fuel.

Andrew Griffith, a former Navy officer who is currently DOE's associate deputy assistant secretary for fuel cycle technologies in the Office of Nuclear Energy, will lead a new effort focusing on storage of reactor waste, sources said. He will report to John Kotek, the office's acting assistant secretary, who staffed the Blue Ribbon Commission.

In recent months, the White House has taken other steps to tackle defense and commercial waste and begin exploring the possibility of burying radioactive nuclear waste far below the Earth's surface in deep, geologic bore holes.

But Yucca backers question just how meaningful this latest step will be -- and what it means for the Nevada repository.

Lake Barrett, a former DOE official turned consultant, said he appreciates DOE's decision to assemble a team to find a path forward for consent-based siting rather than simply blocking Yucca for political reasons.

"For nearly six years, DOE has done virtually nothing, except destroy the Yucca Mountain program for Sen. Reid's 2010 election

campaign," he said, referencing avowed Yucca foe, Nevada Democrat Harry Reid. "Hopefully this is something meaningful and not another red herring distraction attempting to portray some phony progress."

Nevada to pay former state attorney \$500,000 to continue Yucca Mountain fight

Las Vegas Sun

September 8, 2015

[LINK](#)

CARSON CITY — A former state attorney who led Nevada's legal fight against a proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear-waste repository will be paid \$500,000 over the next two years to continue the battle.

The state Board of Examiners today approved the private contract for Marta Adams, who led the state's effort for 17 years until her retirement this year.

Gov. Brian Sandoval said she did an outstanding job during her tenure with the state.

The state Attorney General's Office said it will take one to two years to train a deputy attorney general to replace Adams, who has expertise and special knowledge of the issues.

Bob Halstead, executive director of Nevada's Nuclear Projects Office, said the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission will be in Las Vegas and Armargosa Valley for hearings on the potential impact on water if the high-level nuclear repository is built.

The hearing will be Sept. 15 in Las Vegas and Sept. 17 in Armargosa Valley.

He said the next four months will be crucial in Congress to the future of the proposed Yucca Mountain project. There is a group in the House pushing for the project, but the Senate is taking a more measured approach, he said.

It's going to be a "three-ring circus" for the next four months, Halstead said.

Nuclear project considered by Utah city power agencies

The Standard Examiner

September 4, 2015

[LINK](#)

Northern Utah cities that run their own electric utilities are thinking about going nuclear.

Bountiful, Kaysville, Morgan and Brigham City are considering participation in a nuclear energy project proposed to be built near Idaho Falls at the Idaho National Laboratory. The project would be a joint venture with other municipal power suppliers that are part of the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems.

UAMPS is a consortium of 44 utilities in Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Idaho, California, Nevada, Oregon and Wyoming. Twenty-nine of those are looking at participating in a feasibility study of the project, a UAMPS official said Thursday. All participants would receive matching funds from the U.S. Department of Energy to help pay for the investigation.

The study is part of the Carbon Free Power Project, formed by UAMPS to encourage the deployment of clean electric power in response to the anticipated closure of coal plants nationally.

The Bountiful City Council six weeks ago voted to commit \$200,000 to the study and Kaysville decided Tuesday, Sept. 1, it will set aside \$148,000. Brigham City and Morgan officials could not be reached for comment Thursday.

“Nuclear has had a bad name over the years,” said Allen Johnson, an official with Bountiful’s power department, mentioning calamities such as the Fukushima catastrophe in Japan.

But he said the new technology being considered for the Idaho project is hoped to be much safer. The study will consider building 12 small modular reactors, a new design for nuclear power.

“It appears to be so safe,” he said, referring to tests of the technology. “It could run for years to come. The thing I like about it is that it is carbon neutral — no pollution going into the air. It’s sort of the wave of the future. Coal has become a bad word.”

Johnson said NuScale Power, a New York company, is developing the modular reactors.

Kaysville City Council members Tuesday night said they viewed the nuclear power option as a sound, environmentally conscious

choice.

Johnson said the technology also may appeal to environmental groups that in the past have been bitter enemies of nuclear power.

“The UAMPS folks have talked to the Sierra Club,” he said. “They are not totally going unglued about it. ... They are saying there may be something to this.”

Lindsay Beebe, organizing representative for the Sierra Club’s Utah Beyond Coal Campaign, said she wasn’t sure what the club’s position was on the technology.

“The Sierra Club has traditionally been against nuclear because of the unresolved waste issues,” she said.

Calls to the national press hotline for the Sierra Club Thursday went unanswered.

Mike McGough, chief commercial officer with NuScale, said the Idaho project would be the first modular reactors in the country.

“We’ve been working on developing this technology for about 15 years,” he said.

He said a one-third-scale reactor has been built and is being studied in Corvallis, Oregon.

“We will use that to do the testing to prove the design,” he said.

McGough said each of 12 reactors would continually produce 50 megawatts of electricity in a self-contained environment without the risks of other forms of nuclear power.

Jackie Coombs, project manager of corporate and member relations at UAMPS, said the Idaho Falls site is not necessarily the final choice for the project’s location. Other sites are being studied, she said, declining to name them.

Coombs confirmed that Brigham City and Morgan were considering participating in the study.