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**11**

Consent-Based Siting  
Public Meeting  
Atlanta, GA

[Register online.](#)

**April 2016**

**14**

Consideration of  
Senate Energy and  
Water Appropriations  
bill on Senate floor.

**April 2016**

**20**

“The Challenge of  
Excess Facilities on  
DOE Sites”  
House Nuclear  
Cleanup Caucus  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

## Budgeting for a clean future in Oak Ridge

Oak Ridge Today

April 7, 2016

[LINK](#)

Developing a budget for the massive cleanup efforts undertaken by the U.S. Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management, or OREM, requires advanced planning and careful prioritization of the program's near-term and long-term goals. DOE's vision for a clean future largely depends upon funding designated for the Oak Ridge site by Congress each fiscal year.

Appropriations for Oak Ridge cleanup comprise only a part of the overall budget for DOE's EM Program, which includes a number of additional sites also dealing with the lingering inheritances of the Manhattan Project. The Oak Ridge site has traditionally fared well both in the president's request and in the actual appropriations determined by Congress. OREM experienced a \$36 million increase in its enacted budget for Fiscal Year 2014, meaning the site received \$36 million above what the president even requested for the Oak Ridge cleanup mission. In FY 2015, the site received \$46 million above the president's request. For the current year, OREM welcomed a generous "plus-up" from Congress. Appropriations for FY 2016 were \$102 million above President Obama's request for the program.

"The additional funding of \$102 million above the president's request for FY 2016 has allowed OREM to accelerate progress on spending priorities already well established," said Karen Thompson, OREM's branch chief for Planning and Baseline Management Branch, who spoke to the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board at its March 9 meeting on developing the FY 2018 budget.

Thompson provided a table to show the impact recent increases in the current enacted budget have had on FY 2016 work scope.

Capitol Hill

August 2016

9-10

Third Annual  
Intermountain  
Energy Summit  
Idaho Falls, ID  
[Visit website.](#)

September 2016

14-15

2016 National Cleanup  
Workshop  
Hilton Alexandria  
Mark Center  
Alexandria, VA  
[Visit website.](#)

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Highlights include a sizable increase in funding for transuranic, or TRU, waste operations, which has been applied toward continued processing of TRU waste debris. Twenty-seven million dollars in appropriations was added to OREM's budget to begin addressing excess facilities at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and Y-12 National Security Complex. The boost will be applied to immediate safety concerns and characterization work at seven deteriorating facilities on the two sites. Y-12's Alpha-4 building, often in the spotlight as an example of the site's collapsing architecture, will receive a new roof as part of an effort to maintain the structural integrity and compliance of facilities slated for later decontamination and decommissioning, or D&D. The biggest increase for FY 2016, an additional \$40 million in D&D funds for cleanup at East Tennessee Technology Park, will continue to support cleanup efforts currently underway at the site.

Thompson's presentation provided a general overview of fiscal year planning and stages of budget development as well as addressed specific near-term and long-term spending priorities for cleanup operations across ORR sites.

OREM expresses the program's future milestones as "visions." Near-term campaigns include:

Vision 2016—An effort to complete the demolition and removal of all five gaseous diffusion buildings at ETTP by the end of 2016.

Vision 2020—An initiative to extend Vision 2016 to include cleanup of all facilities at ETTP and prepare to release the land for reindustrialization by the end of 2020.

Vision 2024—The transition from cleanup activities at ETTP to address the mercury contaminated facilities at Y-12.

Achieving these milestones takes tremendous effort. The nearest goal, Vision 2016, is well on its way to completion. Demolition began at building K-27, the last remaining of the five gaseous diffusion buildings, in February, and OREM expects to finish the operation by the end of the calendar year. "There is still

much work to be done across the reservation,” said Thompson, explaining that EM celebrates accomplishments but remains mindful of the whole lifespan of the program and the imagined completion of all its cleanup priorities.

Thompson’s talk occurred as part of an effort to engage stakeholders in shaping those cleanup priorities. The site-specific FY 2018 budget for OREM, which was the main focus of the March 9 presentation, is currently in early development locally, and has not yet been submitted by the Oak Ridge office to EM headquarters for consideration in EM’s overall budget for all of its locations.

“There are opportunities for public input during the budget planning process,” said Thompson. A budget workshop tentatively planned for May 3, similar to the budget workshops organized by DOE for the past two years, will solicit advice from interest groups and leadership within the Oak Ridge community on project prioritization.

ORSSAB is strongly encouraged to make a recommendation on the FY 2018 budget priorities, said Dave Adler, DOE’s Alternate Deputy Designated Federal Officer for Oak Ridge.

ORSSAB will attend the budget workshop in the spring. Following that meeting, the board’s EM and Stewardship Committee will discuss drafting a recommendation on the FY 2018 budget for DOE to consider.

See Thompson’s presentation here: [March 9 ORSSAB Budget Presentation](#).

Note: This story originally appeared in the “Advocate” (April 2016, Issue 62), a publication of the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board. It is published here with permission of the SSAB.

**Senators slam new directive on aid for sick US nuclear workers**

McClatchy DC

April 7, 2016

[LINK](#)

Siding with sick and dying nuclear workers, Washington state's U.S. senators took strong aim Wednesday at a new plan advanced by the Obama administration, saying it could make it much harder for eligible employees to win federal compensation.

"We have seen firsthand the difficulties and hazards cleanup work presents at Hanford," Democratic Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell said in a letter to Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, who's in charge of the compensation program.

At issue is a directive that orders claims examiners to conclude that workers at Department of Energy nuclear facilities have not had any significant exposure to toxins since 1995 "in the absence of compelling data to the contrary."

While the administration has defended the plan as a way to speed up compensation claims, the senators said it appeared to do so "at the expense of the workers the program is designed to compensate."

In their letter, Murray and Cantwell said the Labor Department might create an "institutional bias" against workers across the country who had been exposed to toxic substances in the last two decades.

The veteran senators said it would be "inaccurate" for the Obama administration to decide that any post-1995 exposures would be within existing regulatory standards.

To make their case, they cited the history of workers at Hanford, the 586-square-mile site in Washington state where workers made plutonium for the bomb dropped on Nagasaki as one of the last acts of World War II.

“A cleanup mission inherently means that the workforce is operating in and/or handling hazardous materials and therefore workers remain at risk for exposure,” the senators said.

In a separate move, Democratic Sen. Edward Markey of Massachusetts came to the defense of whistleblowers who’ve exposed wrongdoing at Hanford and other nuclear sites. In a letter to Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, Markey said no public funds should be spent on legal fees for contractors who fought whistleblower suits.

The suits have been a nagging issue of concern for Markey and many others in Congress.

Last year, for example, Hanford contractor URS agreed to settle a lawsuit by a former employee for \$4.1 million. In a major whistleblower case at the Savannah River Site nuclear weapons plant in South Carolina, Sandra Black, who was responsible for looking into concerns raised by employees about everything from health and safety to fraud, abuse and harassment, was fired last year after she told investigators that her supervisors had interfered with her work and had tried to intimidate her into changing her findings.

The letter from Murray and Cantwell marked an initial win for nuclear workers and their advocates, who have been fighting the directive since it was introduced in December 2014.

Many of them have urged Congress to intervene, worrying that it marks the first step toward trying to dismantle or rein in a \$12 billion compensation program that has made payments to more than 53,000 sickened workers or their survivors.

In an investigation published in December, McClatchy reported that 107,394 nuclear workers or their relatives have applied for compensation from a fund set up in 2001 to help those suffering from cancers and other diseases. More

than 33,000 of those workers who received compensation are now dead. In many cases, the money went to survivors.

107,394 The number of workers or their relatives who have applied for compensation from a federal fund set up in 2001 to help those suffering from cancers and other diseases.

Murray and Cantwell are top Democrats on key committees that oversee both the Department of Labor and Department of Energy.

Murray, first elected in 1992, is the ranking member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Cantwell, a third-term senator, is the ranking member on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

While neither senator called for hearings, a Murray aide said the letter began a fact-finding mission aimed at determining whether the new policy was working for sick employees.

Despite stronger standards, safety lapses have continued to plague the nation's nuclear weapons and research sites.

Irradiated

The U.S. government has compensated over 52,000 nuclear workers illnesses related to radiation exposure, but the process is complicated. Deaths resulting from exposure while working at the plants and the compensation process for survivors begs the question: How much is a life worth?

Brittany Peterson McClatchy

McClatchy's examination of government records showed that 25 contractors have paid more than \$106 million in fines for 75 incidents of safety-related misconduct at Department of Energy nuclear sites since 1995. The records also revealed that at least 15 of those contractors had paid \$2.4 million worth of fines for 19 instances of misconduct specifically related to toxic substance exposure.

Unions say the Obama administration directive places a higher burden of proof on construction workers, security guards and other employees who aren't regularly assigned to one particular location.

The Department of Labor has defended its directive, saying it's aimed only at increasing efficiency and delivering workers faster answers on their claims, not at saving money.

In a 2015 memo explaining the directive, Rachel Leiton, director of the compensation program, says claims examiners don't rely only on evidence provided by workers. They also consult industrial hygienists, a database on toxic substances at the nation's nuclear facilities and information supplied by the Department of Energy and its contractors.

"The idea that we somehow have an incentive to deny claims reflects a complete misunderstanding of the program," Leonard J. Howie III, director of the Department of Labor's Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, said in an earlier statement to McClatchy.

Despite the assurances, Terrie Barrie, of Craig, Colorado, founding member of the Alliance of Nuclear Worker Advocacy Groups, said she welcomed the move by Murray and Cantwell, adding it was good that they "are asking hard questions" about the compensation program and the new directive.

It "has the potential to deny worthy claimants who are involved in the cleanup," she said.

### **Thumbs up,Thumbs down**

Tri-City Herald

April 6, 2016

[LINK](#)

## Progress with Hanford cleanup

The decades-long effort to clean up radioactive and other hazardous waste from the Hanford Nuclear Reservation has been marked with delays, cost escalations and missed milestones. But there have been successes, and significant progress has been made. Most notably, on Monday the Herald reported that workers have started recovering waste from vertically buried pipes in an area referred to as the 618-10 Burial Ground.

From 1954-63, large cask trucks, heavily shielded to provide protection from radiation, carried highly radioactive laboratory waste to the burial ground and dumped that waste into vertically buried pipes. Some were made of steel but most were 55-gallon drums, with tops and bottoms cut out and welded together. Others were constructed from corrugated piping.

Cleaning up the 618-10 and 618-11 Burial Grounds was anticipated to be one of the most complex and challenging excavations in the area along the Columbia River. According to the contractor, Washington Closure Hanford, and the Department of Energy, work is progressing well ahead of schedule. That's laudable.

Significant progress is also being made on the recovery of radioactive sludge from a double-shell waste storage tank that developed a leak between the inner and outer shells.

From last Thursday night to Sunday night, about 52,000 gallons of radioactive sludge were pumped out of the tank. That leaves 105,000 gallons of sludge to be removed by a March 2017 deadline.

Washington River Protection Solutions, the contractor responsible for the management of 177 large underground tanks, removed most of the liquid that sat above the sludge in early March.

Removal of liquid and sludge waste from these tanks is difficult for a number of reasons. The complexity of the recovery and other information related to the tanks can be found on the state Department of Ecology website.

Cleanup of the Hanford site started decades ago and it will be decades before it's complete. It's complicated and at times risky work. It's certainly one of the world's most challenging projects.

Thumbs up to the people working diligently toward a solution.

### Underfunding fire prevention

Last year will be remembered as one of the worst fire seasons in state history. More than a million acres burned. Hundreds of homes, commercial buildings and other structures were lost. Tragically, so were the lives of three firefighters.

Public Lands Commissioner Peter Goldmark asked the Legislature for \$24.2 million to fund needed training and fire-fighting resources to improve response times and effectiveness for future fire seasons. He got \$6.7 million.

The Legislature did, however, authorize \$190 million to cover the cost of last year's out-of-control wild fire season.

We think the Legislature was "penny wise and pound foolish" by not appropriately funding Goldmark's request.

### **Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board recommends budget priorities**

Augusta Chronicle

April 6, 2016

[LINK](#)

The Citizens Advisory Board for the Savannah River Site is waiting for a response from its letter outlining budget priorities for the coming year.

Topping the list is cleanup of liquid radioactive waste on the site. Complying with South Carolina and federal laws regarding its disposal is the board's highest concern.

SRS officials have until month's end to formally respond, but a spokesman said the recommendations will be taken seriously.

The letter, signed by board chairman Harold Simon, is addressed to David Moody, the U.S. Department of Energy's site manager. It's dated March 24, the day the board voted on it during a bimonthly meeting in Augusta.

"As in the past, the high-level liquid-waste-management program remains our highest priority," the letter said. "The budget request for Fiscal Year 2017 (sic) should reflect this priority and should be at a level that guarantees compliance with all state and federal agreements so that all high-level-waste-storage tanks are empty by 2028, per the Site Treatment Plan."

Simon warned that the board would closely monitor the formulation of the budget with the liquid waste in mind.

"Any funding short of this would be a great concern to us," he warned.

The 25-member board is made up of citizens from Aiken, Augusta and surrounding communities. Many either work at or are retired from SRS and are familiar with the environmental and economic issues at the federal facility.

The Energy Department draws on the board's input when drafting its budget requests to Washington, according to James Giusti, director of external affairs at SRS for the Energy Department.

“The department earlier this year asked the SRS CAB to review our integrated priority list (IPL) for the Fiscal Year 2018 budget and provide us its recommendations,” he said. “The letter approved last month by the board reaffirms IPL and what the board believes are the funding priorities at SRS. The board’s input will be used by SRS and the Office of Environmental Management in the budget formulation currently underway.”

Beyond the liquid waste, the board’s other priorities, in order, are nuclear materials stabilization and disposition, spent nuclear fuel, soil and water remediation, solid-waste stabilization and disposition, security and Savannah River community support.

While the department begins looking at its requests for the next fiscal year, Congress is still weighing what to appropriate for the current one. A major issue is whether to continue construction of a mixed-oxide, or MOX, processing facility or mothballing it as the Obama administration recommends.

There’s no timetable on when Congress may decide.

### **S.C. can’t relent on SRS nuclear waste**

The Post and Courier

April 8, 2016

[LINK](#)

The announcement that the U.S. Department of Energy plans to move six tons of plutonium from Savannah River Site to New Mexico came as a welcome surprise to the Palmetto State.

After all, South Carolina is where the federal government usually sends nuclear waste. And typically it comes with promises to eventually send it elsewhere that don’t pan out.

Gov. Nikki Haley expressed her support of the DOE decision on Tuesday. But the governor isn't relenting on the demand that the feds pay a \$1 million a day fine based on their failure to meet the conditions of another nuclear waste-related promise.

The governor described the decision as a "big win for South Carolina," but added that "we will continue to watch this process carefully, as the Department of Energy has not lived up to promises made in the past."

Consequently, state Attorney General Alan Wilson is staying the course on a lawsuit that also seeks to force the Department of Energy to live up to its plans for a facility to transform weapons grade plutonium into commercial reactor fuel.

Those efforts recognize that even if the DOE relocation plan comes to fruition five years hence, there will still be seven tons of plutonium and an extensive inventory of other radioactive waste at Savannah River Site with no sure exit strategy.

Congress approved the nuclear fuel plant, known as the MOX facility, in 1998. However, the Obama administration wants to terminate the project, already in an advanced stage of construction, in favor of another disposal project.

Similarly, the expected long-term storage site in Yucca Mountain, Nevada, was unilaterally closed in 2010 by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission chairman, with the support of the White House.

Members of the South Carolina congressional delegation have been successful in maintaining some federal funding for the MOX plant, and they are at it again.

The state of South Carolina agreed to accept tons of highly radioactive material from other defense sites on the promise that there would be an exit plan for it.

Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz' unexpected decision to ship out six tons of neutralized plutonium at SRS doesn't settle the issue.

For example, the state has learned that 750,000 pounds of highly radioactive waste are heading to Savannah River Site from Japan.

And as reporter Derrek Asberry noted, South Carolina can expect to receive continuing shipments of plutonium and other radioactive material from other countries over the next six years.

State officials have plenty of reasons to remain cautious — and assertive in demanding that the federal government quit using South Carolina as a nuclear waste dump.

### **WIPP to welcome governor, host meeting Thursday**

Current-Argus

April 6, 2016

[LINK](#)

CARLSBAD — Thursday promises to be a busy day for Waste Isolation Pilot Plant and Department of Energy officials.

Gov. Susana Martinez will be in Carlsbad for the ribbon cutting of WIPP's new Emergency Operations Center, located at the Skeen-Whitlock Building at 4021 National Parks Highway.

"New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez, along with Secretary Ryan Flynn and the New Mexico Environment Department, did an outstanding job with representing the interests of New Mexicans when putting together the settlement agreement with WIPP," Mayor Dale Janway said in an emailed

statement. "The Governor is here to see the new Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that was part of this settlement.

This EOC promotes safety for WIPP and nearby residents, and I'm honored to get to help introduce and welcome her."

That settlement agreement for \$74 million was announced in January of this year as a result of two safety incidents in 2014.

The new Emergency Operations Center includes a communications system to immediately notify emergency response personnel in case of an event, a web-based system that allows for real-time communication between the center, the WIPP site and other agencies and a video conference system, Nuclear Waste Partnership Communications Director Donovan Mager said in an email.

Later in the day, the city and the Department of Energy will host their quarterly WIPP Town Hall at Carlsbad City Hall.

"These quarterly WIPP town halls are an excellent way to obtain first-hand information about what's going on at WIPP," Janway said. "During our April meeting, we'll have remarks from Mark Whitney, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management, and EM's Los Alamos Manager, Doug Hintze. We encourage everyone to attend."

Whitney managed the department's Russian operations from 2005 to 2008. He is credited with implementing the department's nonproliferation programs there.

Hintze will speak on the establishment of an Environmental Management Office at Los Alamos National Laboratory and corrective actions being taken since a drum of nuclear waste packaged there ruptured in 2014.

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The ribbon-cutting will be at 2:30 p.m. The town hall will begin at 5:30 p.m.  
The town hall will be live streamed at <http://new.livestream.com/rvy/>.

