

Local officials praise long cleanup contract

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The next cleanup contract at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant could be for 10 years, a move praised by local officials who see continued funding of the site and steady employment as a key economic driver for the region.

RYAN HERMENS | The Sun

News that the next contract for cleanup services at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant could be for 10 years in length has drawn praise from local officials.

The DOE issued a draft request for proposals Thursday for deactivation and remediation services at the plant for a prospective period of 10 years, including option periods.

The current deactivation and remediation services contract at the site is held by Fluor Federal Services and expires July 21, 2017.

"I'm very happy to see it," Paducah Mayor Gayle Kaler said. "I think it's a win all the way around. We, as a community, PACRO (Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization), the chamber, city and county have all worked very hard to foster a good relationship with DOE. We go up there (Washington, D.C.) and talk with them. They see us face to face, we communicate a lot."

McCracken County Judge-Executive Bob Leeper agreed.

"It's obviously a positive development economically, to potentially continue the contract for a longer period of time," Leeper said. The longer contract period will make it easier for the contractor to recruit employees, he said, "and for those folks to find roots in McCracken County."

Sandra Wilson said she and Scott Darnell, Paducah Economic Development president/CEO, were in Washington recently discussing the contract with DOE and Kentucky's congressional delegation and staff.

"We talked about the importance of moving forward with that contract," Wilson said. "After our meeting we felt like it (RFP) was going to be out very soon. It's really good news for our community."

Wilson said advocating on behalf of the community is worth the time and effort.

"We've really tried to get our message across," she said. "We've met with them (DOE officials) when they've come to Paducah, and we've gone to D.C. to meet them. I believe it helps for us to be vocal and let them know what is important to our community."

Ken Wheeler is a member of the Paducah Citizens Advisory Board, chartered by the DOE.

"There are several facets that make it (longer contract term) attractive from a community standpoint," Wheeler said. "They (Fluor) had to bring in a number of their employees from other sites, relocating to Paducah. Those folks, understandably, may not be interested in investing a lot of money in a house or other facilities in town if they don't know whether they're going to have a role here.

"Fluor, as a company, has done an outstanding job of trying to be a good community citizen and participate in a lot of activities. But it's been very hard on their workforce to really get a sense of becoming a part of the citizenry of Paducah," Wheeler said. "That's one reason that we've lobbied so hard with DOE to try and get a longer-term contract."

Having a longer-term agreement with the cleanup contractor can benefit all parties involved, according to Wheeler.

"Being able to maintain a sense of continuity (over a longer period) is a real asset not only to the contractor but also the DOE," Wheeler said. "I fully believe they will reduce their costs over time. I also think this will result in very good bidding quality, too."

According to DOE, the draft RFP is designed to provide for open competition on the continuing work at the site and assist the department in developing a final RFP.

DOE has recently initiated tours of the Paducah plant site for the public. Following a press tour of the site March 31 in advance of the tours for the public, Bob Nichols, Fluor Paducah Deactivation Project director of operations, was asked about the next step in the cleanup process.

"I think DOE's probably going to follow the normal procurement cycle," Nichols said, noting Fluor's current contract will be completed in July 2017. "We anticipate that DOE would go back out for a re-compete, and we will just follow the same protocol of any other contractor that wants to come to the site and compete for the work here."