

ECA Update May 9, 2016

In this update:

DOE pulls plan for mercury testing center in park

Knox News

SRS to close eighth radioactive waste tank at celebration

WRDW

CH2M Hill gets 'excellent' rating for Hanford work

Tri-City Herald

Attorney general, senator call for DOE accountability at Hanford

Tri-City Herald

Regulators predict 'small' groundwater impacts from Yucca nuclear site

The Hill

DOE pulls plan for mercury testing center in park

Knox News

May 9, 2016

[LINK](#)

Upcoming Events

May 2016

11

EMAB Meeting
Aiken County, SC

May 2016

12-13

ECA Peer Exchange: Environmental
Management Issues
Washington, D.C.
For information contact:
Ivana@energyca.org

May 2016

18

EM SSAB, Nevada

May 2016

OAK RIDGE — Facing strong opposition, the U.S. Department of Energy has backed off a plan to build a mercury testing and research center on a natural area of Horizon Center, a business park owned by the city's Industrial Development Board.

That proposal would have been "absolutely the opposite" of restrictions DOE placed on any development of those natural areas years ago, board chairman David Wilson said. "They (DOE) wanted them (the natural areas) set aside, and they didn't want them built upon," he said.

Wilson in a recent meeting with DOE officials expressed strong concern about the proposed testing center near East Fork Poplar Creek, which meanders through the park. "We felt it would extremely hamper the further development of the park," he said Thursday.

Horizon Center is a 957-acre tract off Oak Ridge Turnpike in the west end of Oak Ridge. Under an agreement, 489 acres deemed natural areas remain owned by DOE, while the remainder is owned by the board and set aside for economic development as sites for industries and businesses.

Wilson in this week's board meeting expressed his objections and concerns about the planned testing center, which he described as a 1,800-square-foot metal building.

"It would be detrimental to this park to have that kind of facility in it," he said.

The testing center "would provide a location where ORNL (Oak Ridge National Laboratory) scientists can evaluate a variety of approaches to reducing the concentration of mercury in East Fork Poplar Creek and in fish tissue," said Michael T. Koentop, executive officer of DOE's Office of Environmental Management.

DOE has directed its environmental management contractor, UCOR, "to suspend its efforts to select a contractor interested in constructing the facility," Koentop said in an email.

23-24

EM SSAB, Savannah River Site

August 2016

11

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 cleanupworkshop.com

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"We are currently in the process of identifying alternatives that will meet the needs of the Department of Energy and the city of Oak Ridge."

Koentop said results from such a testing center "could provide insight into how to most effectively proceed with environmental cleanup of the (DOE) Oak Ridge Reservation."

The release of mercury, a toxic liquid metal, from the Y-12 National Security Complex, a nearby nuclear weapons plant, into East Fork Poplar Creek has been a vexing, expensive DOE problem for decades.

About 24 million pounds of mercury were brought to Y-12 in the 1950s to process lithium for use in hydrogen bombs. Some 700,000 pounds were lost to the environment and the government can't account for another 1.3 million pounds of the stockpile.

Several grams of mercury a day still seep into East Fork Poplar Creek from a building where lithium was processed, and DOE is building a \$149 million treatment plant at Y-12 to help filter it out before it reaches the creek.

SRS to close eighth radioactive waste tank at celebration

WRDW

May 5, 2016

[LINK](#)

AIKEN, S.C. (WRDW/WAGT) -- The U.S. Department of Energy and the Savannah River Remediation celebrating twenty years of operating defense waste processing.

A release from the Savannah River Site says they also plan to close the eight radioactive waste tank.

On Thursday, May 12, there will be a special commemorative ceremony at SRS. The DOE Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management and SRS leaders will be there.

CH2M Hill gets 'excellent' rating for Hanford work

Tri-City Herald

May 5, 2016

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy announced this week that it has rated the work of CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. at Hanford as "excellent" for fiscal 2015.

The contractor, which is responsible for groundwater and central Hanford cleanup other than waste storage tanks, earned 95 percent of the incentive pay available for the year.

It is eligible to receive \$10.6 million of a possible \$10.9 million available, according to a summary released by DOE.

The pay was based both on performing specific work and on a subjective evaluation. It earned about 90 percent of the pay available for the subjective analysis, or all but about \$300,000.

The contractor removed a record amount of contaminants from groundwater, finished construction of a building to be used to move radioactive sludge away from the Columbia River and removed significant hazards from the Plutonium Finishing Plant in fiscal 2015, said John Ciucci, CH2M Hill president.

DOE said in its summary that CH2M Hill was "very responsive" to the agency's needs.

2.1 billion gallons of contaminated Hanford groundwater treated in fiscal 2015

CH2M Hill had missed none of DOE's legally enforceable Tri-Party Agreement milestones, the summary said.

The company completed work to meet 13 milestones, including drilling wells for groundwater treatment, certifying transuranic waste for shipment to a national repository and removing the last of the pencil tanks from the Plutonium Finishing Plant.

The plant's Plutonium Reclamation Facility had highly contaminated pencil-shaped tanks up to 22 feet long hanging vertically on steel racks. They had to be removed with an aging crane that had been put in service when the facility was used during the Cold War to recover plutonium from scrap material.

DOE praised CH2M Hill for accomplishing a number of DOE's key performance goals for cleanup.

It treated 2.1 billion gallons of contaminated groundwater at Hanford, injecting clean water back in the ground, CH2M Hill said.

It also removed the two high-hazard glove boxes that had been left for last at the Plutonium Finishing Plant, CH2M Hill said. Workers would use gloves attached to portals to reach into the boxes to process plutonium in a liquid solution, turning it into metal pucks for the nation's nuclear weapons program.

\$2 billion awarded by CH2M Hill in contracts to small businesses since 2008

The two boxes stood 12 feet high and had high levels of plutonium contamination. Workers had to contend with significant levels of radiation.

CH2M Hill accomplished work on all its projects while maintaining injury rates that were much lower than the goals for DOE environmental cleanup sites, the summary said.

The contractor also excelled in small business subcontracting. It has awarded more than \$2 billion on contracts to small businesses since 2008, the summary said.

Despite progress at the Plutonium Finishing Plant, the work there also was listed under deficiencies on the scorecard.

Work has slipped behind schedule to prepare the plant for demolition by September. The final evaluation of pay that CH2M Hill can earn for its work at the plant will be figured when demolition is completed, the summary said.

In fiscal 2014 CH2M Hill earned a slightly higher percentage of the pay possible, 98 percent, but less money was available and it earned \$9.7 million.

Attorney general, senator call for DOE accountability at Hanford

Tri-City Herald

May 5, 2016

[LINK](#)

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson say their patience is wearing thin waiting for Department of Energy results at Hanford.

Both visited Richland Thursday, with Wyden also touring Hanford.

Ferguson is looking at options to accelerate a lawsuit he filed last year to protect Hanford workers against chemical vapors associated with radioactive waste held in underground tanks.

As of Thursday, 47 Hanford workers had received medical evaluations for possible exposure to chemical vapors over the seven days that began April 28.

“How many Washingtonians need to be exposed to vapors before the federal government solves this problem?” Ferguson asked at a press conference.

The exposures in recent days illustrate why Ferguson felt the need to file a lawsuit in September against the Department of Energy and its tank farm contractor, he said.

The issue is not just the workers who have reported potential exposures in recent days, but the hundreds of workers who have been exposed over the last two decades as report after report is written about chemical vapors and worker protection, he said.

The lawsuit, which has been combined with one filed by Local Union 598, which represents Hanford pipefitters and welders, and Hanford Challenge, a Seattle-based advocacy group for Hanford workers, is not set to go to trial until next May.

It is a big case and complicated, Ferguson said, and he would like action to better protect workers before then.

He also has asked his staff to investigate possible legal avenues that the state could pursue in addition to the lawsuit.

Real people are behind the numbers tallied for possible exposures, he said, and he thinks about how he would feel if an exposed worker were a member of his family.

He has called on President Barack Obama and Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz to take the same personal perspective on tank exposures.

If it takes getting workers on supplied air respirators to protect them, that is what should be done, he said.

Workers currently wear supplied air respirators for work at Hanford that is expected to increase the risk of chemical vapors, primarily when tanks are emptied or waste is otherwise disturbed.

The initial reports of suspicious smells and symptoms such as headaches and coughing appeared to be linked to work to empty waste from a double-shell tank with an interior leak and transfer it to a sturdier double-shell tank.

That work stopped when chemical vapors were first reported last week. Workers have continued to report smells or symptoms. Most of the continuing reports were from workers in the tank farms.

Of the workers who were medically evaluated, 34 reported symptoms and 13 had no symptoms but were evaluated as a precaution. All workers have been cleared to return to work.

Both Ferguson and Wyden were scheduled to meet with affected Hanford workers after the press conference Thursday.

Wyden had broader concerns. He toured the Hanford tank farms to learn about work to empty waste from leaking or leak-prone underground tanks, and asked why progress on tank waste is so slow.

“Citizens want to see results,” he said.

Some \$19 billion of taxpayer money has been spent in 20 years, “yet not one single gallon of high-level radioactive waste has been treated,” he said. That’s about \$1,700 spent per every resident of Oregon and Washington state.

Hanford has 56 million gallons of radioactive waste stored in underground tanks, some since World War II when the site started producing plutonium for the nation’s nuclear weapons program. A vitrification plant is being built to treat the waste for permanent disposal, but it is not expected to start treating some radioactive waste until 2022 and be fully operational until 2036.

The site has major league problems and it needs more than minor league solutions, Wyden said.

He will consider what he learned Thursday at Hanford and take some time to lay out the next steps, he said.

Although he gave no hint of what action he may take, in the past he has effected change at Hanford through legislation. He passed a law in 1990 that created what came to be called the Wyden Watch List, a list of tanks at risk of an explosion because of a potential buildup of flammable gas.

Congress wants to give experts on Hanford a wide berth, but the nation still needs to see results, he said Thursday.

There are “very decent and honorable people” at DOE who told him Thursday morning that Hanford issues and work are complicated, he said.

But “what is the department going to do after decades and \$19 billion to show real results?” he asked. Deadlines always seem to be missed and the goal posts always seem to be moved.

“We have got to do something different,” he said.

He remains concerned about the buildup of flammable gas in tanks. Although DOE closed out the watch list to fanfare in 2001, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board said in 2012 that DOE needed to do more to guard against a buildup of flammable gases in its 28 double-shell tanks.

The issue is yet to be resolved, with DOE officials telling Wyden they were working through a phased, multi-year plan.

Wyden also raised questions about why the bottom of double-shell Tank AY-102 had not been inspected nearly four years after it was confirmed to be leaking waste between its shells.

The technology does not exist, officials said.

Kevin Smith, manager of the DOE Office of River Protection, said he had issued a challenge to the DOE national labs to come up with a crawler that could withstand the radiological environment to get a look at the bottom of double-shell tanks.

Concerns have increased about Hanford's tanks after work last month to empty waste from Tank AY-102, when the rate of leakage increased dramatically.

No waste is believed to have breached the tank's outer shell, and waste in the 30-foot-tall space between the tanks has remained at 4.6 inches deep for more than a week. DOE pumps waste back into the primary shell when it reaches a little more than 5 inches deep between the shells.

Questions also have been raised about whether a second double-shell tank, Tank AY-101, has developed an interior leak.

DOE officials told Wyden that a radiation reading in the space between its shells appeared to be from contamination as long ago as 1976 and they do not believe the tank is leaking. A video inspection showed no waste between its shells.

His briefing at Hanford included a rundown of policies used to protect workers from chemical vapors.

Washington River Protection Solutions is in its 15th month of implementing a detailed plan to better protect workers based on the recommendations of an independent panel led by the Savannah River National Laboratory.

That more than 40 workers have reported concerns should be a wakeup call, Wyden said.

Regulators predict 'small' groundwater impacts from Yucca nuclear site

The Hill

May 6, 2016

[LINK](#)

The Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site could have a "small" environmental impact on groundwater over a million-year timeframe, nuclear regulators predicted.

In a 300-page analysis of the proposed nuclear waste repository, staff from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) said the Department of Energy (DOE) did not properly account for radioactive contamination of groundwater and the impact if that groundwater reaches the surface.

The DOE's study was completed in 2008 as part of the congressionally mandated and since stalled preparation for Yucca.

The Obama administration cut off most preparation for Yucca in 2010 in response to opposition in Nevada and elsewhere.

But congressional Republicans hope to provide funding for Yucca at some point, and the NRC is still obligated to conduct its analysis of the application that President George W. Bush's administration submitted.

"This supplement evaluates the potential radiological and nonradiological impacts — over a one million year period — on the aquifer environment, soils, ecology, and public health, as well as the potential for disproportionate impacts on minority or low-income populations," the agency wrote in its report.

"The NRC staff finds that each of the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on the resources evaluated in this supplement would be small."

The report released late Thursday follows the 2015 completion of a years-long study by the NRC staff into potential safety impacts from Yucca.

Overall, the staff found that Yucca would remain safe during the million-year time frame it has to study.
