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Hanford board: Contractors should be pushed to give back

Tri-City Herald

June 11, 2016

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The Department of Energy should hold new Hanford contractors accountable to help the communities they join as three large Hanford contracts expire in the coming years, said the Hanford Advisory Board.

The board sent a letter to DOE after its Richland meeting concluded Thursday, making recommendations on selecting new contractors, who will influence the success of Hanford environmental cleanup for at least the next decade and possibly longer.

The board's advice was driven by getting the best value for taxpayers, improving worker safety, reducing the stress on workers of contract changes, nurturing small business and supporting the community, said board member Mike Korenko.

In the past, DOE's bid packages have asked prospective contractors how they would help the community they are joining, the letter said. But allowing contractors to be reimbursed for community support fell out of favor because it reduced the money available for environmental cleanup.

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Yet, the state and local communities have costs associated with the contractors, ranging from those related to the work force commute to higher education to prepare future workers for Hanford jobs, board members said.

Current contractors are not investing enough in the communities given their lucrative pay, the letter said.

THE HANFORD CONTRACTS FOR TANK FARM OPERATIONS AND CENTRAL HANFORD CLEANUP ARE SET TO EXPIRE IN 2018, FOLLOWED BY THE SUPPORT SERVICES CONTRACT A YEAR LATER.

The board suggested that offering a credit of just 3 to 5 percent for community commitment in the bid evaluation could help communities.

The Environmental Management Site Specific Advisory Board, which includes representatives of advisory boards for cleanup sites across the nation, also proposes investment within the community to be considered in contract awards.

Draft advice by the national board says contractors should be encouraged “to become good stewards by investing resources back into the communities that serve them.”

Investments ranging from scholarships to purchasing goods locally help foster healthy relationships between DOE and local communities, the draft says.

The Hanford Advisory Board struggled with a proposal that contractors be allowed to stay longer at Hanford.

Many of the prime contracts are awarded for an initial five years, with possible extensions capped at a total of another five years.

The board was unable to reach consensus among all members for extensions to be granted for a total contract length of 20 years.

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But the letter said increasing the potential for extending the duration of contracts would have multiple benefits.

IN MY HISTORY OF 30 YEARS OUT ON THE RESERVATION, THE BIGGEST, MOST COSTLY DETERRENT TO PROGRESS ON CLEANUP IS CONTRACT CHANGE.

Jerry Peltier, Hanford Advisory Board member

“A large number of contract bids of shorter duration strains DOE and contractor resources,” the letter said. “There are 16 prime contracts across the DOE complex that will all be up for re-bid between 2016 and 2018.”

At Hanford, DOE is working on bid packages as the tank farm contract held by Washington River Protection Solutions is expected to expire in September 2018. The central Hanford and groundwater cleanup contract held by CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. will expire at the same time and the support services contract held by Mission Support Alliance is set to expire a year later.

Contracts with the potential for more than 10 years would encourage contractors to invest in new technologies with longer-term payoffs, the letter said.

Fewer transitions would eliminate the months spent by new contractors getting up to speed and would reduce the stress on employers and their families caused by job uncertainty at each contractor transition. It also would mean less time spent by DOE employees preparing new contracts.

“In my history of 30 years out on the reservation, the biggest, most costly deterrent to progress on cleanup is contract change,” said board member Jerry Peltier.

Board member Don Bouchey pointed out that Battelle has had its DOE contract to operate Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland extended for a total of more than 50 years because of its good performance. Hanford is under the DOE

Office of Environmental Management and the national lab is under the DOE Office of Science.

UNFORTUNATELY, COST SAVING IN THE NEW CONTRACT OFTEN COMES AT THE EXPENSE OF WORKERS BY THE REMOVAL OF PENSION BENEFITS, INSURANCE BENEFITS, COST SHARING FOR BENEFITS AND VACATION/SICK LEAVE.

Hanford Advisory Board

The board also said the transition period between the old and new contractor should have a fixed price, rather than DOE reimbursing costs, which would encourage a short transition with a detailed plan. A short transition reduces disruption to work and stress on the work force.

The board favors reducing the overall number of Hanford prime contractors, saying duplication of management and administration could be avoided to save money.

There would be more consistency in engineering, safety and training practices and improved ability to move workers among projects.

The board recommended two contracts for Hanford cleanup work, one for the tank farms and one for other cleanup work in central Hanford, the remaining cleanup along the Columbia River and for site infrastructure. The vitrification plant construction would continue under a separate contract.

To strengthen DOE oversight of contracts, the board advises the government hire registered professional engineers and certified project managers who meet or exceed contractor qualifications.

Mandatory loss of pay for health and safety violations, including retaliation against whistleblowers, would help provide strong oversight, the letter said.

The board also wants DOE to emphasize the need to maintain current labor agreements in new contracts, rather than letting contractors lower their cost estimates by reducing benefits.

To help small businesses, contractors should be required to describe their small business strategies, including offering multi-year subcontracts and incentives for prompt payments.

Idaho A.G. explains firm stand on nuclear waste

Idaho State Journal

June 12, 2016

[LINK](#)

POCATELLO — Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden didn't draft the historic 1995 agreement between Idaho and the U.S. Department of Energy regarding radioactive waste at the Idaho National Laboratory, but he's determined to protect it.

It has resulted in Wasden coming under political pressure. That's because he has refused to sign a waiver to bring more spent nuclear-fuel rods to the INL until the DOE makes good on its promise to begin processing 900,000 gallons of liquid sodium-bearing high-level waste stored at the site into a solid form.

That liquid waste is currently housed in three large stainless steel tanks reinforced by concrete located above the Snake River Aquifer. It has been there for 60 years.

Treating that liquid waste was part of the 1995 agreement signed by then-Gov. Phil Batt and Idaho Attorney General Al Lance. The agreement requires both the governor and attorney general to approve any waivers to bring additional spent fuel into Idaho unless the waste cleanup is finished.

“I have an independent responsibility and obligation to fulfill the 1995 agreement,” Wasden told about a dozen people gathered for a town hall meeting Thursday evening in Pocatello City Hall. “I’m not going to run away from that responsibility.”

Pocatello Mayor Brian Blad had invited Wasden to give the presentation and said Idaho citizens deserve to hear both sides of the argument when it comes to bringing additional nuclear materials to the INL.

Concern about the INL becoming a nuclear waste dump first surfaced in the 1980s when Cecil Andrus was governor. At one time, Andrus order the Idaho State Police to block a trainload of waste headed to the site near Arco. Negotiations between the DOE and Idaho led to the 1995 Batt agreement and it was ratified by about two-thirds of Idaho voters in 1996.

According to that agreement, all the liquid waste stored at the INL was supposed to be converted to solid form by Dec. 31, 2012.

“They (the DOE) haven’t processed a single ounce and that concerns me,” Wasden said.

Although the tanks holding the waste have never leaked, Wasden said carbon steel tanks holding the same type of liquid waste at the federal Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington State are leaking.

The attorney general said he appreciates that INL is the best facility for doing research on spend fuel rods and it could bring additional funding and more jobs to Idaho. But he wants to see progress on the liquid waste cleanup before he signs off on additional shipments to Idaho.

The first request for Idaho to accept additional nuclear rods came from the DOE in 2004. Idaho granted a one-time waiver for a small quantity of spent fuel to come to the INL for research in 2011, but established a protocol reminding the DOE it had to comply with the 1995 agreement.

Then in December 2014, the DOE sent a letter to Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter requesting additional shipments to the INL without notifying the attorney general. Wasden said he sent a letter to the DOE in January of 2015 notifying the federal government that it was out of compliance with the 1995 agreement because the Integrated Waste Treatment facility at the INL wasn’t operational.

Wasden said this led to allegations from the DOE and political leaders in Idaho, including Gov. Otter, that Idaho’s Attorney General was obstructing progress at the site and hampering the nation’s nuclear program.

“I didn’t put a single deadline on the DOE, not ever,” Wasden said. “I just wanted them to show progress on the cleanup.”

Using a computer slideshow, Wasden showed the exact language in the 1995 agreement that shows the only leverage Idaho has to force the DOE to clean up the liquid waste at the INL is to refuse additional shipments of spent nuclear fuel.

The agreement states the “sole remedy” for noncompliance by the DOE “shall be suspension of DOE spent fuel shipments to the INEL.”

In 1995 the Idaho National Laboratory was called the Idaho National Energy Lab.

The attorney general said he’s optimistic that the DOE will solve technical issues regarding the processing of liquid waste at the site. Then Idaho can resume a role in conducting research on additional spent fuel. In the meantime, he’s holding the line.

Wasden’s resolve led to a joint resolution without hearings in the Idaho Legislature this spring that called for a waiver on spent fuel rods and suggestions from Gov. Otter that it might be time to de-consolidate legal services in Idaho now under the direction of Idaho’s highest elected legal official.

“I’m just trying to fulfill my obligation to Idaho,” Wasden said.

Those attending Thursday's meeting gave Wasden a round of applause.

"It's nice to have an attorney general who stands up for us," said Rep. Mark Nye, D-Pocatello.

Public influence seen in new Hanford cleanup deadlines

Tri-City Herald

June 9, 2016

[LINK](#)

The influence by the public can be seen in a major set of extensions to environmental cleanup deadlines newly approved by the Department of Energy and its regulators.

In fall 2015, the Tri-Party agencies — DOE, the state Department of Ecology and the Environmental Protection Agency — proposed extending deadlines for work in central Hanford and some of the last cleanup work to be completed along the Columbia River.

Those deadlines have been adopted by the Tri-Party agencies, they announced Thursday. But some substantial changes to the package of deadlines were made based on public comments.

"The public was really clear in its values during the public comment period," said John Price, the Tri-Party agreement section manager of the Department of Ecology. "We appreciated the feedback from the public and agree on the new milestones DOE added."

The same issues resonated from public meeting to public meeting, whether in the Tri-Cities or elsewhere in Washington and Oregon, said Dennis Faulk, Hanford program manager for the Environmental Protection Agency.

Many people attending public meetings on the proposed new deadlines said they were not comfortable with a decision to remove a deadline calling for most cleanup in central Hanford to be completed in fall 2024 and replace it with “to be determined.”

The new deadline for the work was to be determined after studies are completed on the extent of contamination and how it should be addressed.

In response to public concerns, a new deadline of 2042 has been set. It would cover central Hanford cleanup other than the huge facilities that processed irradiated fuel to separate out plutonium for the nation’s weapons program and the underground tanks storing radioactive waste from fuel processing.

This and other central Hanford work has fallen behind schedule because of a decision made to focus resources on Hanford cleanup closest to the Columbia River for much of the last decade.

The Richland Operations Office would have needed \$1.7 billion this year to work toward meeting the original deadlines and even then could not have physically accomplished the work, Faulk said. The office has a budget of about \$990 million this year and the Obama administration has proposed \$800 million for next year.

Public concerns also persuaded the agencies to add some new deadlines to the Tri-Party agreement.

- The changes proposed and approved by the agencies give DOE three more years, until September 2021, to complete cleanup of the 324 Building, which has a highly radioactive spill beneath it. An additional deadline has been added requiring that most of the cleanup of the spill be completed in September 2019. The site is just north of Richland and near the Columbia River.
- DOE must start some work toward assessing the condition of waste disposal tunnels near the PUREX processing plant by September 2017. They potentially are a high-risk area.

- Work must start by September 2018 to characterize the waste in unlined burial grounds in central Hanford. The trenches were used to dispose of waste that may be contaminated with plutonium before 1970.

\$1.2 billion estimated annual cost for all Richland Operations Office work with addition of new deadlines

Other deadlines, which remain unchanged since the initial proposal, include submitting dates for the start of cleanup of the main fuel processing facilities in 2026. They also include extending the date 10 years from the current year to complete studies of contamination and possible methods of cleanup of key central Hanford areas until 2026.

Price said when the package of changes were proposed that they are among the 10 most significant in the Tri-Party agreement's history. Since it was signed 27 years ago, more than 450 changes have been made.

The new changes are based on realistic budget outlooks, unlike past negotiations, in which regulators generally told DOE to obtain the money needed, Faulk said.

The changes, in addition to other required work, still would require Richland Operations Office budgets of about \$1.2 billion annually, rather than the more typical recent budgets of close to \$1 billion per year.

Los Alamos may face hazardous waste penalties

Las Cruces Sun-News

June 9, 2016

[LINK](#)

SANTA FE — The Los Alamos National Laboratory mishandled hazardous waste and should expect to face civil penalties, according to a violation notice issued by the state of New Mexico.

The New Mexico Environmental Department found 12 violations during a June 2015 inspection, including open waste containers, failure to label containers as hazardous waste, not describing what was inside certain waste drums and failure to properly package drums containing free liquids, The New Mexican reported.

The report also noted that receptacles for newly-generated waste were often too far from the place where the waste was generated. In addition, the lab had incomplete emergency contact sheets and didn't share its emergency plans with first responders.

A failure to promptly correct the problems is also a violation of the lab's waste management permit, according to the violation notice.

Lab managers were notified in the June 1 letter that further lapses could result in legal action or a fine of \$10,000 per day.

The Environment Department also said a civil penalty would be issued because of the lab's "past history of noncompliance."

A spokesman for the lab said Wednesday that the majority of potential violations identified in last years' inspection have already been addressed. According to the violation notice, the lab told the Environmental Department in March about the corrective actions, but some improvements still fell short.

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, an independent federal oversight body, also inspected the lab earlier this year.

It found that aging infrastructure at the lab's plutonium work site wouldn't protect the community if an earthquake occurred along the fault lines underneath there.

After its November review of the site, the National Nuclear Security Administration told the lab in December that its contract will be put up for bid

when it expires. The report also indicated that the lab had made several improvements and would receive the majority of an award for fiscal year 2016.

Mercury cleanup at Y-12 could cost \$3B

Knoxblogs

June 10, 2016

[LINK](#)

The cleanup of mercury contamination at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant could ultimately cost up to \$3 billion, according to a Department of Energy report.

The report, dated February 2016, states that the estimated cost for mercury remediation at Y-121 is between \$1 billion and \$3 billion. The report was prepared to outline the technology plans for [mercury cleanup at Y-12](#), as well as DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

Here's an excerpt about the Y-12 situation:

“The overarching challenges at Oak Ridge include remediation of the large quantity of residual elemental mercury still present in shallow source zones adjacent to and beneath former mercury use facilities, potential mobilization of mercury during planned deactivation and decommissioning of large mercury-contaminated facilities and associated infrastructure overlying potential mercury sources, potential mobilization of other contaminants, and the persistence and bioaccumulation of methylmercury (the most toxic form of mercury) in the East Fork Poplar Creek watershed despite remediation effort,” the report states.

Enormous quantities of mercury were used at Y-12 for lithium-separation processes during the Cold War development of hydrogen bombs. During peak years — 1950-63 — about 11 million kilograms of mercury were used at the plant. About 3 percent of this total was released into the environment, according to DOE estimates.

Here's a link to [a 2012 series](#) on the mercury problems.

Oak Ridge Mall redeveloper seeks help

Knoxville News Sentinel

June 10, 2016

[LINK](#)

OAK RIDGE — After months of preparations, an executive with the would-be redeveloper of the Oak Ridge Mall property said his company is ready to buy the tract by month's end and immediately begin construction of its Main Street Oak Ridge project there.

But there's a loose end that needs to be tied up, a last hurdle before RealtyLink LLC begins the multimillion dollar overhaul, company executive Neil Wilson says in a letter to City Manager Mark Watson.

The Greenville, S.C., company wants to make sure it gets first dibs on land across the street that's now part of the Department of Energy's American Museum of Science and Energy tract should it ever become available.

"Any redevelopment of that property that competes with Main Street either directly or indirectly will be devastating to our efforts," Wilson's letter states.

"We must be able to control the redevelopment of that property."

According to Wilson, "time is truly of the essence in resolving this final issue."

In response, City Council during Monday's meeting will consider a resolution asking DOE, through its agent, the federal General Services Administration, for the right of first option on the museum property should DOE decide to dispose of it.

If the property is transferred to the city, RealtyLink would then get first rights to buy the tract, according to the resolution.

Since 2006, every would-be developer of the old mall has been "concerned about what could happen across the street" on the museum property, said Ray Evans, an economic development consultant for the city. Evans said the Main Street Oak Ridge project is "so thin financially for these developers."

He said proposed lease rates for Main Street Oak Ridge tenants aren't as pricey as they would be in Farragut or many other locations. "The margin is so very thin for these guys (RealtyLink) they have to minimize their risk," he said.

There's reportedly no immediate plan by DOE to divest itself of the museum's front yard. But the museum for years has had an uncertain future, with concerns that DOE funds shouldn't be used to operate such a facility. The department now spends \$1.5 million a year to keep the museum afloat.

City Manager Mark Watson in a memo to City Council said that with the city being named part of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, the museum's front yard could be used "to help secure a path forward for their mission of public education and public outreach."

David Keim, spokesman for Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which operates the museum for DOE, said Friday there's no move afoot to use the museum's front yard to boost the national park.

But Watson noted the museum property is part of a 20-year Tax Increment Financing District that's crucial for the Main Street Oak Ridge project. Over those 20 years, "something could happen to that property," Watson said. "We need to be prepared and hedge our bets."

A proposal to obtain most of the museum's property — which fronts busy Illinois Avenue — for commercial development was kicked around several years ago but then discarded.

Oak Ridge Mayor Warren Gooch in a speech in early May announced the first four stores that have signed lease agreements to locate in Main Street Oak Ridge: Dick's Sporting Goods, Ulta Beauty, T.J. Maxx and PetSmart.

The only two current tenants in Oak Ridge Mall, Belk and J.C. Penney, are renewing their leases, Gooch told members of the Oak Ridge League of Women Voters.

For a decade, the mall's future has been uncertain and the subject of concern by city officials. Chattanooga developer Steve Arnsdorff bought the mall in 2003 from Crown American for a reported \$6 million, but his redevelopment plans, envisioned as Oak Ridge City Center, floundered.

A new developer, Crosland Southeast of Charlotte, N.C., was chosen in 2013 by Arnsdorff and partners to take over the mall redevelopment but abruptly — and mysteriously — abandoned its efforts last year.

That's when RealtyLink stepped into the picture.

Los Alamos app allows users to visit 1940s 'Atomic City'

AP: Island Packet

June 11, 2016

[LINK](#)

Los Alamos, a once secret city where scientists participated in the nation's classified World War II nuclear development program, can now be experienced much like it was then with a new app.

The "Los Alamos: The Secret City of The Manhattan Project" iPhone app takes users through an "augmented-reality" while visiting the northern New Mexico city to see it in its 1940s character. The app was created by Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Packed with games, historical nuggets and role playing, the app allows users to feel what it was like to join a secret project in an unknown location where the future of the world was at stake, said Jennifer Payne, Resource Management Team leader in Los Alamos' Environmental Stewardship Group. Because Los Alamos has changed since the project and is now a modern city, Payne said the app takes users on a virtual tour of a Manhattan Project world that is gone.

"It took us more than a year to create," Payne said. "Almost all of the structures from that era don't exist anymore."

Once downloaded and opened, users will receive a "recruitment telegram" to begin the virtual journey from 109 E. Palace Ave., in Santa Fe. That's the same location where the original Project Y staff members joined the team. Users then will receive an initial "clearance" there, then board a bus into the mountains to explore "the Hill."

From there, Payne said users can choose how much information they want to know while they explore Los Alamos as the bomb is developed.

Of course, no actual nuclear secrets are shared, she said.

Officials said the project is a collaboration of Los Alamos National Laboratory's VISIBLE team, the Bradbury Science Museum, and staff history specialists.

Developers also are working on an Android app.

During World War II, Los Alamos scientists worked to develop the atomic bomb that was dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The secret program provided enriched uranium for the atomic bomb. It also involved facilities in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Hanford, Washington.

July marks the 71st anniversary of the Trinity Test in southern New Mexico. The milestone comes amid renewed interest in the Manhattan Project thanks to new

books, online video testimonies and the recently canceled TV drama series "Manhattan."

Agencies Collaborate To Move Americium To LANL

LA Daily Post

June 10, 2016

[LINK](#)

Gov. Susana Martinez announced during a press conference last week the safe removal and transport of hazardous material from a Santa Fe warehouse to Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The governor made the announcement, together with New Mexico Environment Department Cabinet Secretary Ryan Flynn, Laboratory Director Charlie McMillan and NNSA Site Manager Kim Davis Lebak, during a morning press conference June 2 at LANL's J. Robert Oppenheimer Study Center at TA 3.

A team of some 40 people worked together from these agencies to move a drum containing 2.1 grams of americium, used in the manufacture of household smoke detectors, from a Thermo Fisher Scientific warehouse at 5981 Airport Road Feb. 21 to the laboratory.

Martinez praised the teamwork of the NMED and its Radiation Control Bureau; along with regional neighbors LANL, DOE, NNSA and the Americium Transport and Removal Team in safely transporting the americium, a radioactive transuranic chemical element, out of Santa Fe to a safe repository at Los Alamos.

"For over 10 years a small quantity of a dangerous material languished inside a drum ... near a church and a school and there were no plans for disposal," Martinez said. "Our priority was safety and that's how our neighbors and LANL were able to help us."

Flynn explained that Thermo Fisher Scientific closed its smoke detector manufacturing plant in 2003 and couldn't find a way to dispose of the americium.

They secured the plant as much as possible, put up a fence around the property and installed security cameras. They also paid a security guard to check on the drum twice a day for the last 13 years.

“The private company was absolutely motivated to find a solution,” Flynn said, adding that the hazardous material was never in danger of “getting loose” but the key safety risk was getting into the wrong hands and being used as a “dirty bomb.”

Thermo Fisher Scientific agreed to pay all expenses associated with moving the americium up to LANL, which total around \$6 million including such things as employee time, transport and LANL research and analysis, Flynn said, and there was no cost to the taxpayer.

“We had two options ... put the material in a facility like the laboratory or keep it indefinitely in a storage warehouse and that option was unacceptable to the state,” Flynn said.

“We as a state don’t get enough time to celebrate what LANL does for the state and the country in terms of security,” he said.

Flynn thanked the laboratory and its experts for helping to find a creative and safe solution for a difficult problem.
