

# ECA Update: December 28, 2015

## *In this update:*

**DOE - IG Report: Worker Safety and Health at the Y-12 National Security Complex**  
ECA Staff

**Contract to manage federal nuke lab up for grabs after 2017**  
AP: business Insider

**Oak Ridge building's classified contents add to difficulty of demolition project**  
Knox Blogs

**More plutonium headed to SRS**  
The State

**Memo to Fluor employees concerns cleanup funding**  
News Watchman

**Safety at INL is paramount, personal**  
Idaho Statesman: Opinion

**Department of Energy starts search for spent fuel repository**  
Aiken Standard

**S.C. Gov. Haley skeptical of federal plutonium disposal plan**  
The Charlotte Observer

**DOE Extends Contract to Operate Depleted Uranium Hexafluoride Conversion Plants**  
DOE-EM

**DOE - IG Report: Worker Safety and Health at the Y-12 National Security Complex**  
ECA Staff

The Office of Inspector General has issued a report titled "Worker Safety and Health at the Y-12 National Security Complex," as a result of the IG receiving complaints regarding the violation of certain safety measures and protocols at the Y-12 complex.

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## Calendar

### **DOE Consent-Based Siting Public Meeting**

January 20, 2016  
1 PM - 4 PM EST  
Marriott Renaissance  
Washington, DC,  
Downtown Hotel  
999 9th St NW,  
Washington, DC 20001

**Save the Date:**  
DOE National Cleanup

A copy of the full report is now available and can be read [here](#).

**Contract to manage federal nuke lab up for grabs after 2017**

AP: business Insider

December 21, 2015

[LINK](#)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — The annual \$2 billion contract to manage one of the federal government's premier nuclear weapons laboratories will be up for grabs after 2017.

The National Nuclear Security Administration opted against extending Los Alamos National Security's contract to run Los Alamos National Laboratory because of repeated failures over the past four years to meet certain performance goals.

Los Alamos National Security — a consortium that includes the Bechtel Corp., the University of California and others — has held the contract at the New Mexico facility for nearly a decade.

The latest performance review calls for docking the lab's manager \$7.7 million in incentive fees for an incident that left one worker hospitalized for more than a month with burns over 30 percent of his body, and for potential contamination stemming from the handling of highly enriched uranium at a Nevada facility. Top officials with the National Nuclear Security Administration outlined the fee reductions in memos sent to Lab Director Charlie McMillian earlier this month.

The correspondence, obtained Monday by The Associated Press, urged management to work with federal regulators to ensure "accountability for safe, secure, effective, efficient and economical management and operations of the laboratory."

In all, Los Alamos National Security stands to lose about \$10 million in performance fees, or more than one-quarter of what it was eligible for during the last fiscal year. The consortium took the biggest hit when it came to meeting operational and infrastructure goals, but made improvements in science and national security work.

McMillan told employees in an email last week that while the lab's performance wasn't good enough to ensure an automatic contract extension, the review was better than those for the previous two fiscal years.

Workshop  
September 14-15, 2016  
Hilton Alexandria Mark  
Center  
Alexandria, VA

"We continue to provide strong value to the national security missions, and Los Alamos continues to be regarded highly for the quality of its science," he wrote.

The management team also missed an opportunity last year to earn a contract extension after it was hammered for errors that led to a radiation leak.

The leak forced the nation's only underground nuclear waste repository to close indefinitely and stalled cleanup work at defense-related sites around the country.

McMillian acknowledged in his email the seeming insurmountable challenges faced by the lab at the start of the year. But he also listed accomplishments that included gaining a clearer understanding of what went wrong with the lab's waste-handling processes and restoring pit manufacturing capabilities at its plutonium facility.

Spokesmen for the University of California and Bechtel said Monday the latest review shows improvements are needed in some areas, but the lab remains a world-class research institution. The consortium has held the Los Alamos contract since 2006, when it was put out for bid following a series of security problems at the lab.

The current contract expires in September 2017, but managers could continue through 2018 as part of a transition period.

The National Nuclear Security Administration declined to comment on the decision regarding the contract, saying only that the assessment process is expected to be complete by mid-January and documents related to the annual review will be made public. Members of New Mexico's congressional delegation announced over the weekend that they were informed of the review.

Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, all Democrats, said the federal government must hold its contractors accountable, be a responsible steward of federal funds and take action under the contract to ensure the safety of workers, the community and environment.

**Oak Ridge building's classified contents add to difficulty of**

## **demolition project**

Knox Blogs

December 26, 2015

[LINK](#)

One of the most challenging projects in the Department of Energy's nuclear cleanup program is hardly nuclear at all.

The biggest concern in cleaning up and tearing down K-1037 is not radioactive waste but rather the classified contents of the big building once used to produce "barrier" — a secret component of the gaseous diffusion technology used to separate isotopes of uranium for use in atomic bombs and nuclear reactors.

"The barrier is sintered nickel powder," Mike Koentop, executive officer in DOE's Office of Environmental Management, said in response to questions. "Any elaboration beyond that is classified." The principal hazards at K-1037 are "typical industrial wastes," according to Anne Smith, a spokeswoman for UCOR, the Department of Energy's cleanup manager in Oak Ridge. "There are no significant radiological contaminants in the building," Smith said.

The challenge will be dealing with all the classified equipment and material inside the 380,000-square-foot building on the east side of the East Tennessee Technology Park — a sprawling site that once housed the nation's largest uranium-enrichment complex.

The decommissioning and demolition project is going to cost many millions of dollars, but the Department of Energy isn't saying how much.

"We are still working through the process to determine what is going to be required to successfully complete the project, so we don't have an accurate estimate at this point," Mike Koentop, executive director of DOE's Office of Environmental Management said.

There is still the potential for surprises.

"We've had crews in there for several months, characterizing the building," Sue Cange, DOE's cleanup chief in Oak Ridge, said recently following a tour of the site with Mark Whitney, a top official from DOE headquarters in Washington.

"We have started to consolidate and remove a lot of the combustible materials that have been stored in the building,"

Cange said. “There’s a lot of excess personal protective equipment, file cabinets full of paper, just standard equipment and materials that have been in storage in the building for a long time.”

K-1037, like some of the other old and inactive buildings at the government’s Oak Ridge sites, was used as a sort of catch-all for stuff no longer needed.

Cange said she wanted Whitney to get an up-close look at the building so officials in Washington would understand the difficulties.

“All of the barrier production equipment is still in the building,” she said, “and of course the primary challenge that we have with that building is the classification concerns.”

The barrier technology is reportedly one of the most classified parts of the gaseous diffusion operations that the United States used to produce its stockpile of enriched uranium for the Cold War arsenal.

Those classification concerns will affect how DOE and its contractors deal with the equipment and how the building will be taken down.

“It’s got a lot of complexities,” Cange said.

The current schedule is for demolition of K-1037 in 2018, so that leaves two years for preparation, she said. It’s possible that the demolition activities could spill over in 2019, she said.

Asked if DOE planned to chop up the equipment to eliminate the classified aspects, Cange said that hasn’t been decided.

“We’re still working with the classification officers and with our headquarters to determine the appropriate approach for dealing with the building from a classification perspective.”

DOE’s Oak Ridge landfill for cleanup wastes is designed to accept classified materials, and Cange said the agency expects that at least some of the wastes — such as the building rubble — will be eligible for disposal there.

## **More plutonium headed to SRS**

The State

December 22, 2015

[LINK](#)

More plutonium is targeted for disposal at the Savannah River Site as concerns rise about an existing stockpile of the radioactive material already on the weapons complex.

Nearly a ton of plutonium, a toxic nuclear weapons component, would be sent from Europe, the Pacific Rim and North America to SRS, where it would be stored until the government decides its final destination, according to a recent U.S. Department of Energy report.

The DOE environmental assessment, completed in November, shows ships would unload the plutonium in Charleston and secure trucks would carry the weapons-grade material 134 miles from the port to SRS near Aiken and Augusta.

It's being sent to the United States so terrorists can't steal the material, the federal government says. Some of the plutonium is coming from Japan, according to the DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration.

Some of the plutonium "is among the most sensitive nuclear materials in the world – exactly the type of material that we need to ensure never gets into the hands of terrorists," NNSA spokeswoman Francie Israeli said in an email this week.

Plans to send more plutonium to SRS are surfacing as state and federal officials struggle over what to do about existing plutonium on the 310-square mile site near Aiken.

During the past 15 years, the Energy Department has sent plutonium from nuclear sites across the country to SRS to eventually make mixed oxide fuel for atomic power plants. But construction of a factory to create the fuel is years behind schedule and billions of dollars over budget – and South Carolina leaders aren't happy about it. All told, SRS has at least 12 metric tons of plutonium stored there.

Gov. Nikki Haley said last week she wants the government to process the plutonium already on SRS. If not, the government should remove the material, she said. She is considering a lawsuit against the federal government for its failure to process or get rid of the plutonium. Federal law also could result in fines next year of \$1 million per day against the federal government for failure to

process the material.

Haley spokeswoman Chaney Adams said this week the governor opposes permanent disposal of plutonium at SRS.

“The governor has been clear about this critical quality of life issue since the beginning of the administration,” Adams said in an email. “South Carolina will not be a dumping ground for weapons-grade plutonium and nuclear waste.”

Late Tuesday afternoon, The State newspaper learned the Energy Department is considering a plan to ship about six metric tons of plutonium now at SRS to an existing DOE disposal site in New Mexico. Details were not available, but a notice outlining the plan is expected in the federal register as soon as Christmas Eve, records show.

Such a plan could ease concerns in South Carolina, but it would not resolve all of the issues or answer all of the questions about the plutonium buildup at SRS. It wasn't known if the overseas plutonium to be shipped to SRS would be included in any New Mexico disposal plan.

According to plans to import waste to SRS, seven countries would send plutonium to the U.S., over approximately seven years. A dozen shipments would be made, with cargo loads varying, depending on the country of origin. The report does not list the countries.

Once at SRS, more than 800 of the 1,980 pounds sent to SRS would need to be processed so it could be safely stored. That would take about three years.

The study said one of the greatest threats from transporting plutonium is a vehicle accident that could send the material into the environment. Another concern is if a ship sank and a plutonium package ruptured. In each case, people and sea life could be affected.

Plutonium is a key ingredient in nuclear bombs that can cause cancer if people breathe particles or drink water tainted by the material. Despite that, the environmental study dismissed the potential threats as remote and emphasized the transport would be done safely.

The shipment from Europe and the Pacific Rim would not be

unprecedented at SRS, which has been receiving foreign atomic material for years. Some of the material originated in the U.S. and was used for research purposes in other countries.

Federal officials have a policy of bringing nuclear materials generated in the United States back to this country after they've been used in other countries. The idea is to keep the material from falling into the hands of rogue nations, which could make the material into nuclear weapons.

### **Memo to Fluor employees concerns cleanup funding**

News Watchman

December 22, 2015

[LINK](#)

In a memorandum to Fluor-BWXT employees by Dennis Carr, site project manager, on Sunday, Carr shared information about the federal Omnibus bill that will provide the decontamination and decommissioning (D&D) project at the former Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant at Piketon with funding through the rest of fiscal year 2016.

“Last Friday Congress approved and President Obama signed a \$1.1 trillion Omnibus funding bill for the federal government for the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2016,” Carr’s memo states in part. “I am pleased to inform you that this funding bill, when combined with the forecasted barter proceeds at the current market pricing, will provide an adequate level of funding to sustain our project momentum and avoid any significant impacts to our workforce for the remainder of this FY.

“This should be seen as great news and a direct reflection of the confidence the Department of Energy (DOE) and Congress have placed in the ability of our workforce to safely deliver on our cleanup mission. This includes key field accomplishments like removing the final pieces of process gas equipment from the X-326; maintaining the Department’s most prolific waste shipping campaign; maintaining our aging infrastructure while processing cylinders in support of our uranium barter program and delivering two Records of Decision. There’s no doubt — 2015 was an exceptional year!”

Carr stated that no one on the project should take the funding and the confidence placed in workers for granted.

“We must continue to earn the support we have garnered by safely delivering on our cleanup commitments, most importantly by completing the deactivation and achieving a ready-to-demolish state in the X-326 facility by June 2017,” he stated. “While the requested funding for the Onsite Waste Disposal Facility was significantly reduced from \$35M to \$21.7M in the Omnibus, this funding level will permit us to complete the design, the clearing of the trees from the facility footprint and begin installation of the necessary utilities, fencing and storm water controls.”

Carr expressed appreciation for the individuals and organizations that helped in the fight for funding.

“Were it not for their efforts almost a third of our workforce would have been impacted and facing a very difficult new year,” he said. Carr thanked DOE, including senior leadership at PORTS,

Lexington, Kentucky, and in Washington “for seeing fit to pursue the necessary funding for our project given the many other needs across the complex.”

He also thanked members of the Ohio Congressional delegation, including Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Senator Rob Portman (R-OH); Congressmen Brad Wenstrup (R-2nd District), Bill Johnson (R-6th District), and Steve Stivers (R-15th District); Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-9th District); county commissioners from Pike, Scioto, Jackson, Ross, Adams and Lawrence counties; local business leaders and organizations; members of the PORTS Site Specific Advisory Board and the Southern Ohio Diversification Initiative (SODI); and USW (United Steelworkers) and SPFFPA (Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America) union leadership led by Herman Potter and Paul Davis, respectively.

“For the past seven months they have tirelessly and effectively worked in a unified manner for the single goal of closing the more than \$80M funding gap confronting our project and avoiding the layoff of more than 500 of our project staff,” Carr stated. “If you get an opportunity, please thank these deserving individuals and organizations.”

### **Safety at INL is paramount, personal**

Idaho Statesman: Opinion

December 23, 2015

[LINK](#)

Those who experienced the Cold War remember what the world was like. A generation of American patriots spent their careers making sure our country stayed ahead of the Soviet Union's growing conventional and nuclear arsenal.

We take pride in their accomplishments, from the beginning of the Manhattan Project in 1942 to today, when 19 percent of the nation's electricity — and 63 percent of its carbon-free electricity — is generated by nuclear power.

I understand firsthand their dedication and sacrifice. My father worked as a nuclear weapons assembler and craftsman. My mom directed and tracked the movement of nuclear weapons parts around warehouses. Many employees at Idaho National Laboratory also are second-generation Cold War warriors.

And so I'd like all Idahoans to understand something: For many of us, this is personal. Nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of our workforce. These are our friends and neighbors, our parents, children, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins.

With the clarity of decades of experience and knowledge, we do things differently now. At the time, the nuclear industry was in the early stages of its maturation process. Think of the automobile industry prior to seat belts and air bags.

Since those early years, the Department of Energy and the national labs have implemented significant, robust measures to ensure our people are protected when conducting this very important work. As pointed out in a recent Idaho Statesman column by Rocky Barker, the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program is available to Cold War workers, and to their families.

At INL, we are working with DOE and its other national labs to make sure we are protecting our workers. It is our top priority every single day. We do this by emphasizing a safety culture taught to us by the experiences of the past. INL leaders demonstrate a commitment to safety in their decisions and behaviors. INL employees embrace personal accountability, avoid complacency and are encouraged to challenge conditions or activities that could compromise safety.

When mistakes are made, it's incumbent upon lab leadership and employees to learn lessons and implement changes to ensure mistakes are not repeated.

Barker's column, and an accompanying McClatchy story, focused primarily upon events that took place nearly a half-century ago. I'd like to address two recent events at INL that made headlines. In 2011, workers at the lab's Zero Power Physics Reactor were exposed to radioactive plutonium oxide. As former INL Director John Grossenbacher said publicly, this should not have happened. INL leadership took seriously this event and agreed with the DOE report that concluded the accident was preventable. As a result, the facility was closed for nine months and corrective actions were implemented.

In August 2014, a small leak occurred at the Advanced Fuel Cycle Initiative Glovebox. This was discovered and brought to light through the diligence of our conscientious employees. It was self-reported. The leak was well below regulatory limits, but INL leadership stopped work in the glovebox and initiated an investigation.

Significant controls were implemented, including a novel leak-testing methodology. Development of this methodology not only benefited INL, but also national labs across the DOE complex.

The vital work we do here — safeguarding national security, designing tank armor to protect our combat troops, protecting our electric grid, and helping produce the clean, carbon-free energy that will power our future — gets accomplished only if INL's nearly 4,000 researchers, technicians, engineers and support staff have confidence they will return safely to their families.

We believe in our mission. We value our people. We learn from the past, and because of that Idaho's national laboratory continues to have the honor of taking on the big energy and security challenges that will determine what kind of world we leave our children and grandchildren.

Beierschmitt is deputy director at Idaho National Laboratory.

### **Department of Energy starts search for spent fuel repository**

Aiken Standard

December 23, 2015

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy has officially started searching for states and communities interested in housing the nation's nuclear

spent fuel.

Execution of this approach would officially reverse the controversial Yucca Mountain project, which was expected to house defense and commercial materials and remove waste from sites around the nation, including the Savannah River Site and four nuclear power plants in South Carolina

A Monday announcement from Franklin Orr, the under secretary for science and energy, states that the consent-based approach would need a pilot interim storage facility, a larger interim storage facility and long-term geologic repositories.

“To support each of these elements of an integrated waste management system, the strategy also emphasizes the importance of a consent-based approach to siting waste storage and disposal facilities throughout the decision making process,” Orr said. The Department of Energy will move forward by hosting public meetings across the country in 2016, according to Orr. Those interested in commenting about the process can email the Department of Energy at [consentbasedsiting@hq.doe.gov](mailto:consentbasedsiting@hq.doe.gov).

Monday’s notice comes on the heels of a similar announcement in March in which President Barack Obama authorized a search for separate material repositories for high-level radioactive nuclear weapon-related waste and spent nuclear fuel rods from commercial electric generation.

The Savannah River Site houses spent fuel and nuclear waste. Numbers reported in March indicate that under the plan, defense waste from three weapons-related facilities – SRS, the Hanford Site in Washington state and Idaho National Lab – would be sent to a repository.

Together, the facilities house an estimated 23,294 canisters of glassified waste, with SRS holding 7,824 canisters, according to March numbers.

Since then, liquid waste contractor Savannah River Remediation reported that it has produced an additional 93 canisters of the material, which is a waste form that is suitable for long-term storage at a repository.

In 2010, Obama ordered work on Nevada’s Yucca Mountain project to cease, leaving \$13 billion of work on the table. Since then, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has produced

several reports indicating that Yucca Mountain is a viable location for storage; however, the federal government is pressing forward with the consent-based approach.

A few states, including New Mexico and Texas, have already shown interest following the March announcement. But Chaney Adams, a spokesperson for South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, said in May that the governor is committed to not bringing in more shipments of nuclear waste or fuel to the Palmetto State.

“Gov. Haley has been clear on this issue since taking office – South Carolina’s taxpayers have paid for Yucca Mountain, and it should be completed and opened,” Adams said.

### **Talks continue over Savannah River Site missed waste milestone**

Aiken Standard

December 23, 2015

[LINK](#)

It is unclear whether the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control will impose fines for a missed waste deadline at the Savannah River Site after the agency promised it would hold off until Dec. 18.

The agency, or SCDHEC, has been in talks with the U.S. Department of Energy following the missed startup deadline of the Salt Waste Processing Facility.

Once operable, the facility will increase efforts to treat the liquid waste stored in more than 40 SRS waste tanks.

Under a permit signed by both parties, the waste facility was supposed to be operating by Oct. 31. Another milestone associated with continued construction of the facility was missed on Sept. 30, 2011.

Fines of \$105,000 a day could have started in 2011. Today, the total amount SCDHEC could attempt to levy is close to \$154 million.

When contacted by the Aiken Standard, SCDHEC would not state whether the agency would pursue fines at this time.

SCDHEC Spokesman Jim Beasley said the agency is still talking with the Department of Energy and is shooting for an early to mid-

January date to wrap up discussions.

“At this time, we continue to discuss the matter with them,” Beasley said.

The two agencies will continue taking time to renegotiate deadlines, schedules and funding commitments for startup of the Salt Waste Processing Facility.

Construction of the facility is currently 89 percent complete and is on track to be finished by May 2016 and operating by December 2018; however, the facility has been plagued by cost overruns and delays, including a cost projection that states it is nearly \$1 billion over budget.

The facility was initially expected to cost \$1.4 billion; however, it is now expected to cost about \$2.3 billion.

The Energy Department directed questions sent Monday to SCDHEC, but said last month it “greatly appreciates SCDHEC’s willingness to allow the discussions an opportunity to resolve the issue.”

### **S.C. Gov. Haley skeptical of federal plutonium disposal plan**

The Charlotte Observer

December 24, 2015

[LINK](#)

A federal plan to send toxic, weapons-grade plutonium from the Savannah River Site to New Mexico drew tepid support Wednesday from South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who is pushing the government to get the material out of the Palmetto State.

A statement from Haley spokeswoman Chaney Adams called the proposal “a good thing,” but questioned whether the U.S.

Department of Energy will make good on its plan. Last week, Haley threatened legal action against the federal government because it has for years failed to process the plutonium or move it off of SRS.

“This is, obviously, a good thing for South Carolina, but only if the feds follow through on the report and actually move the waste from Savannah River,” Adams said in an email. “The DOE does not

have a great track record of keeping its promises to the people of South Carolina, which is why we will continue to push them in every way we can to make sure our state is not a dumping ground for others' nuclear waste.”

The DOE proposal, which surfaced this week, would send six metric tons of plutonium to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad, N.M. The New Mexico site is an underground atomic waste disposal area carved from a salt mine. It is now shut down following a 2014 nuclear accident, but is expected to reopen, perhaps as early as 2016.

Surplus plutonium would be processed at SRS and turned into a waste material that officials say would be suitable for disposal in the New Mexico burial site, according to the plan that's expected to be listed in the federal register today.

The proposal to move the six metric tons is significant because it is the first plan of its kind, and the amount to be moved is sizable, said Tom Clements, who runs the nuclear watchdog group Savannah River Site Watch. SRS is known to have about 13 metric tons of plutonium. The material to be moved is from the United States and other countries, Clements said. A public notice says a final decision to ship the material to New Mexico could be made in about a month.

But Clements and Don Hancock, who heads the Southwest Research and Information Center, said the plan faces plenty of hurdles, ranging from a lack of funding to public opposition in New Mexico. There also is limited space at the New Mexico site that could preclude any shipments from SRS, they said. Resolving all those issues could take years. The research center is a New Mexico environmental group.

“This is pretty typical DOE: making a bad situation worse,” Hancock said, noting the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant was not designed to take weapons-grade plutonium from SRS. “A lot of people would say this is not OK.”

Leaving excess plutonium at SRS has been a source of concern in South Carolina for 15 years. During the early part of this century, the DOE designated SRS as a national repository for surplus plutonium no longer needed to build nuclear bombs. It then began shipping tons of material from other federal nuclear sites to SRS for storage and eventual processing in a mixed oxide fuel plant.

But construction of a plant to make the mixed oxide fuel in the United States is years behind schedule and billions of dollars over budget. Haley says the government needs to either process the plutonium or get it out of South Carolina. A federal law, which critics say has loopholes, subjects the DOE to fines of up to \$1 million per day for failing to make MOX fuel from the plutonium or move it out of South Carolina.

Plutonium, often considered one of the most dangerous atomic materials, is a primary component of nuclear bombs that can cause cancer in people exposed to it.

The proposal to build the MOX plant resulted from an international nuclear non proliferation agreement with Russia to get rid of 34 metric tons of weapons grade plutonium in each country. Clements, who opposes construction of the MOX plant, said he hopes the plan to send some plutonium to New Mexico signals the government's further reluctance to build the plant.

### **DOE Extends Contract to Operate Depleted Uranium Hexafluoride Conversion Plants**

DOE-EM

December 24, 2015

LEXINGTON, Ky. – The U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management (EM) today announced it is extending its contract for Operations of Depleted Uranium Hexafluoride (DUF6) Conversion Facilities at Paducah, Kentucky and Portsmouth, Ohio for a period of up to nine months. The contract period for the current contractor, BWXT Conversion Services LLC (BWCS), had been scheduled to expire on January 1, 2016.

This contract extension, valued at approximately \$68 million, is intended to accommodate DOE's competitive procurement process for a new DUF6 Operations contract. This action will allow the Department's selection, award and transition to the new contract to occur without interruptions of ongoing services.

Ongoing services currently performed by BWCS that will continue during the nine-month contract extension include operating the DUF6 conversion facilities, and continuing cylinder surveillance and maintenance for the DUF6 inventory and conversion facilities, among other services. The DUF6 conversion plants were designed and constructed to convert DOE's inventory of more than 700,000

metric tons of DUF6 left over from decades of uranium enrichment at DOE's gaseous diffusion plants to a more stable uranium oxide form for beneficial reuse or disposal.

The mission of the Office of Environmental Management is to complete the safe cleanup of the environmental legacy brought about from five decades of nuclear weapons development and government-sponsored nuclear energy research.

