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Idaho DEQ accepting public comment on Idaho National Laboratory Site Treatment Plan

EP Newswire

December 2, 2015

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The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality will be accepting public comment on the Idaho National Laboratory's (INL) annual update to its Site Treatment Plan (STP) until December 31.

The STP dictates how the laboratory, operated by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), will manage mixed wastes at its facilities. In its annual update, the DOE specifies how the INL will stay in compliance with changed milestones, covered waste systems and waste treatment plans both at the laboratory and for off-site mixed waste included in the STP.

The DEQ is accepting public comments submitted on its website or via mail to its Boise state office. All information pertaining to the

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STP can be viewed online or at the DEQ State Office and DEQ Idaho Falls Regional Office.

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December 11

SRS Citizens Advisory Board committee hears update on waste management filtration improvements

The Augusta Chronicle
December 1, 2015

[LINK](#)

NEW ELLENTON — Members of the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board Waste Management Committee received an update Tuesday on upgrades that have improved speed and efficiency in the separation and removal of radioactive contaminants.

The process utilized at the Modular Caustic Side Solvent Extraction Unit (MCU), which removes and separates varying levels of radioactive waste for eventual storage, has operated at peak production at times this year, according to Brent Gifford of Savannah River Remediation.

“Our mission (at MCU) is to continue to optimize the process ... to increase volume without increasing disposals in South Carolina,” Gifford said. “(Introduction of) next generation solvent improved performance and we have continued to benefit from improvements. In early 2015 we had the best performance we’ve ever had on record.”

Gifford said the facility had processed contaminated solution at up to around 8 gallons per minute (from a targeted average of 4 gallons per minute), with higher processing speeds only being limited by how fast the solution could be introduced into the facility.

“We are very pleased (with production),” Gifford said. “We have set 30-, 60- and 90-day production records and processed 5.4 million gallons since starting in 2008.”

In addition to down time for regular maintenance, Gifford said the MCU is also impacted by shutdowns at facilities ahead of it in the flow process, but that each of those instances have been used to complete upgrades that would increase efficiency in the process.

“If you have a hiccup in one facility it quickly ripples through other facilities,” Gifford said.

Two issues the facility tackled in 2015 included filtration

improvements and “choke points” created by the increased production, which necessitated additional solution sampling.

“The faster you run the more samples you need and it’s kind of a winner’s problem, but it can lead to a choke point,” Gifford said, adding that changes have been made to lessen and eventually eliminate the problem. Gifford said the MCU facility expects to restart production this week to further test the additional modifications.

Citizens Advisory Board member Ginny Jones, who represents Richmond County, congratulated Gifford and his team on the success they have enjoyed this year.

“It’s a tribute to you and your staff that we continue to see these kinds of improvements,” Jones said. “I remember a presentation we had a while back and the statistics then, and then to see it today, that’s great.”

Hearing the update, CAB member David Hoel of Aiken County said he was concerned the MCU might be shuttered too soon ahead of the opening of a newer facility currently under construction. The Salt Waste Processing Facility, which Department of Energy officials say will render the MCU unnecessary with processing capabilities far superior to what is possible today, is expected to open in December 2016.

Jim Folk of DOE said the original plan had been to “take down” the MCU facility some 18 months ahead of completed construction of the Salt Waste Processing Facility, but that the current plan will maintain production capability at the MCU facility until success at the new plant is confirmed.

“(Based on) numbers of hopefully 6 to 9 million gallons a year (processed), if everything is good we will have thanked MCU for a job well done and move on,” Folk said. “By that time we will have a good idea that the (SWPF) is good and ready to go.”

New security firm takes over at LANL
Santa Fe New Mexican
December 2, 2015
[LINK](#)

A company with a worldwide footprint in security, training, logistics and operations has taken over protective security at Los Alamos

National

Laboratory.

The consortium that operates the nuclear lab for the U.S. Department of Energy awarded the contract to Centerra, formerly known as Wackenhut Services.

The five-year contract requires the company to provide armed, trained and Energy Department-certified security police officers and associated personnel “to safeguard the Laboratory and its assets 24 hours a day, 365 days a year,” Centerra said in a news release. The statement also said, “LANL is home to more than 10,000 employees and tenants, 11 nuclear facilities and more than 1,200 buildings across 36 square miles of DOE-owned property.”

The contract was awarded by Los Alamos National Security LLC, a joint venture of Bechtel National Inc.; Babcock & Wilcox Technical Services Group Inc.; the University of California; and URS Energy and Construction Co. The partners are responsible for the operations and management of the lab through September 2017.

“Centerra successfully completed transition and began full performance on Dec. 1. During transition, Centerra worked with both the outgoing contractor and with LANS to onboard existing protective force personnel and retained nearly 90 percent of the incumbent work force,” the company stated.

A company spokeswoman said Centerra has about 350 employees on-site in Los Alamos. She said the five-year contract consists of a three-year base agreement with two one-year options.

The award comes after a contentious period involving the previous security firm, SOC, a subsidiary of Day & Zimmerman, an engineering and construction firm based in Philadelphia. Some 250 SOC workers faced the threat of a strike or a lockout when the company reached an impasse in negotiations earlier this year with its unionized workforce, the International Guards Union of America Local 69.

As a result of the deadlock, LANS prepared contingency plans in the event of a strike or a lockout. The company reached a new five-year deal with its workers in June, and local members praised the agreement as bringing stability to the New Mexico workers.

The amount Centerra will be paid under the new contract has not yet been made public. The SOC contract had been awarded in 2010 at \$250 million per year for three years with extensions.

Centerra has other contracts with the Energy and Defense departments, including at the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in New Orleans, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, the Savannah River Site, the Nevada National Security Site, Sandia National Laboratories at Livermore, Calif., and at the Hanford Nuclear Site in Washington state.

In addition to security, the company provides such services as fleet maintenance, search and rescue, facilities management and hazardous materials safety.

Founded in 1960, Wackenhut merged with G4S in 2005 and formed G4S GS in 2011. In 2014, the company was acquired by Alvarez & Marsal Capital Partners and renamed Centerra Group LLC, according to a company statement.

It is headquartered in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., with regional and subsidiary offices in Maryland, Texas and Virginia.

Nuclear cleanup work sustains ailing Ohio town
Marketplace Economy
December 4, 2015
[LINK](#)

Norm and Betty Jo Anderson have lived in Piketon, Ohio, a tiny town in the Appalachian foothills, since the 1950s.

It's a company town, but the major employer is not your average company. It's actually a Cold War-era uranium enrichment plant that was once a giant federal project, the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant. Norm Anderson worked there from the beginning and retired in 1999 — he says he had a reputation at work.

“I was called ‘Hard Head,’ because I had my way of doing things,” he said, laughing.

Norm and Betty Jo, who have been married since they were barely out of high school, sit on their brown plaid living room couch, often holding hands, constantly laughing and talking over each other. They're serving as my Pike County history experts: Norm remembers the early days of the plant, when tens of thousands of people were on site to build huge structures, some of the largest in the world at the time.

“It’s hard to tell people of the magnitude of those buildings,” he said. The one he worked in had 33 acres to a floor.

“And those were concrete floors. Can you imagine pouring 33 acres of concrete?” he added.

But when Norm and Betty Jo talk about the plant, there’s a sense of nostalgia bordering on sadness. The plant stopped enriching uranium about 15 years ago. The technology for enrichment has advanced significantly. But almost 2,000 people go to work there every day just cleaning up the site. Now, even some of those cleanup jobs could be in jeopardy.

In the '50s, Piketon and the nearby town of Waverly were boom towns: visiting workers were put up in shacks, and housing went up in rows almost overnight. The plant still employed thousands of people through the 1990s.

The enriched uranium was used for bombs in the early years, then later submarines and power plants.

“We’re disassembling it literally piece by piece right now,” said Jeff Wagner, the public relations guy for Fluor, the contractor that’s running the Portsmouth cleanup.

We stand outside the web of chain link and razor wire that encloses the plant as we talk. In the oldest building inside, there’s a Star Trek–type control room, with old-school analog gauges covering every wall. I met three guys whose job is to sit there in shifts, 24-7, monitoring for leaks in the old industrial equipment. In the newest building, that equipment is being cleaned and removed, each giant piece wrapped in thick plastic for shipment. Workers wear full hazmat suits, and truckloads of dinosaur-sized equipment leave here daily.

“It goes to a DOE certified disposal site in Nevada,” Wagner said.

The Department of Energy oversees the project. On top of the contaminated machinery, the agency is dealing with chemical spills on the land and in the groundwater — the kind that were sort of routine back in the '50s and '60s, but are now known to be toxic.

The whole cleanup is expected to take at least until 2042, Wagner said. And, there’s the B-word.

“The timeline is really predicated on the budget,” he said. With a work slowdown, it could take until 2054 to get the Portsmouth site cleaned up.

The budget is what Fluor and Ohio’s senators have been jostling with the feds about—the money allocated to this cleanup has fluctuated. This summer hundreds of workers at the plant got layoff warnings and offers of buyouts, because the budget for fiscal year 2016 could go down about \$50 million from the amount spent in the 2015 fiscal year.

Betty Jo and Norm Anderson say Piketon’s already struggling. Nearly one in four people lives in poverty in Pike County, and problems with drugs and hunger have escalated as other industries have left.

“This area just doesn’t have anything,” Norm Anderson said. “We don’t have industry any more like we used to. We used to have steel mills. We used to have shoe factories.”

The nuclear cleanup is one of the only things left bringing jobs and money into the area. In the 2000s, there was some hope that an experimental project enriching uranium with new technology on the Portsmouth Plant site would become a permanent fixture, but that project has been put on permanent hold.

And here’s the conundrum: if the cleanup slows down because of layoffs, that means a longer time living in the shadow of the Cold War. But when the cleanup finishes, hundreds of jobs will be gone forever.

“It’s not gonna affect us when that plant is shut down,” Betty Jo said. Norm is long since retired, and their four kids long since moved away. “Just everybody we love around here is going to go. And that’s sad.”

Ultimately, Congress will determine the budget, taking into account the request from DOE. Jobs here could also depend on how raw uranium sells on the open market: the project makes some money every year from unenriched uranium sales, and there are thousands of rusty barrels of that just sitting on the site.

Aiken Standard files FOIA to view Part 2 of MOX study

Aiken Standard

December 6, 2015

[LINK](#)

The Aiken Standard filed a Freedom of Information request Thursday seeking Part 2 of a study that looks at alternatives to the nation's MOX project.

The MOX project is expected to use the Savannah River Site's Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility, among other Department of Energy facilities, to convert 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear fuel.

However, the project has been criticized by congressional lawmakers and others for being too costly, which is why Congress mandated last year that the Department of Energy oversee a study of MOX alternatives.

Part 2 of the study was scheduled for a mid-September release and Congress reportedly received the study in early October. The study has not been released to the general public, which is why the Aiken Standard has filed a FOIA for its release.

The Aiken Standard is seeking an expedited release of the study because of language crafted in the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, which was signed by President Barack Obama on Nov. 29.

The bill requires DOE Secretary Ernest Moniz to provide cost and timeline updates of the MOX project to Congress so that Obama can use the assessment in his upcoming fiscal year budget request. "An expedited release of this study will help the public better understand all of the information recently provided by government-appointed groups on the MOX project," the Aiken Standard wrote in the FOIA.

"Furthermore, it will assist stakeholders in forming conclusions that can then be taken into account before decisions are made regarding the future of the MOX project."

Aerospace Corp. was selected to conduct the study.

Part 1 of the study concluded that the MOX method has a lifecycle cost of \$51 billion, compared to a \$17 billion cost for a downblending method. Downblending would dilute the plutonium and send the final product to a repository.

Part 2 of the study will review three other plutonium disposition options. One option, the use of fast reactors, is currently being used

by Russia to hold up its end of the nonproliferation agreement.

In that process, plutonium-based nuclear weapons would be broken down into plutonium metal and used to charge a casting furnace. The plutonium would then be blended with uranium and zirconium in the fast reactor, creating a metal fuel out of the weapons-grade material.

Another option is immobilization, and it would include the construction of a “can-in canister” facility. Plutonium would be immobilized into either a ceramic or glass form, placed in a can and surrounded with high-level waste glass, or HLW glass, in a glass waste canister.

The final method is the use of a deep borehole and would consist of drilling boreholes into crystalline basement rock. Holes would run to 5,000 meters deep. Canisters would be placed into the lower 2,000 meters of the borehole, and the upper borehole would be sealed with compacted clay or cement.

The politics of nuclear waste disposal
The Hill
December 8, 2015
[LINK](#)

The closure of nuclear power plants — seven at last count — and the role of nuclear power in a low carbon world has received a fair amount of media coverage, including a piece in The Hill. What hasn't, however, is what to do about the nuclear waste stored at these plants and which will continue to be stored at these abandoned facilities for many decades to come. While the topic has become a political hot potato, some in Congress, like Illinois Rep. John Shimkus (R), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, recognize its importance and the need to address it in short order.

First, it's important to understand the reasons for the trend toward closures. The U.S. nuclear fleet is old. While many licenses to operate have been extended, required upgrades are expensive and regulatory oversight is extensive. Compounding the problem is the availability of reliable and cost-effective alternative power sources: shale production in the United States has contributed to a significant drop in gas prices and made natural gas-generated electricity comparatively cheap; also, increased accessibility to lower-cost renewable energy due to declining costs and supportive policies for investment has squeezed the profitability of nuclear generation. Finally, demand for electricity has declined due to a combination of

efficiency improvements and manufacturing shifts. As one analyst described the plight of nuclear energy: You cannot roll back the rules of economics.

Second, it's useful to have some historical context. In 1987, Congress amended the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 and designated Yucca Mountain in Nevada as the exclusive site for the study of a nuclear waste storage facility. In 2002, the decision to go forward was signed by the then-secretary of Energy and approved with overwhelming bipartisan support in both houses of Congress. In 2008, on the heels of a completed study and the declaration of Yucca Mountain as an appropriate storage for spent nuclear fuel, the U.S. Department of Energy filed for a license to begin construction. Shortly thereafter, however, activity in and around the site rapidly ground to a halt due to opposition from the administration and some of Nevada's politicians. According to the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI), by 2020, the resulting cost to industry will be almost \$20 billion.

Not surprisingly, the government inactivity has led to a shift in the conversation away from plants producing electricity and creating waste to plants being decommissioned and the waste being stranded on site. If Yucca Mountain is taken off the table as a permanent storage site, every nuclear power plant that has been storing nuclear waste on an interim basis could become its own version of Yucca Mountain. The Maine Yankee Plant, closed in 1997, is still home to 60 nuclear casks and 550 metric tons of waste. As well, the Pilgrim plant in Massachusetts recently announced it is to be closing and is estimated to have 3,000 radioactive rods in storage that will be stored on-site indefinitely. Utilities owning a nuclear plant are now caught in real bind. According to press reports, every dismantling decision has been accompanied by a request to divert reserved funds to also cover costs for long-term fuel storage. In the case of Vermont Yankee, this is a double-whammy. Not only are its reserve funds insufficient, forcing the utility to mothball the plant for 60 years until the dismantlement fund is adequate, the utility is pursuing an additional line of credit of \$145 million to build a storage facility and estimates that it will take an additional \$225 million for storage operation and security.

Stranded nuclear waste is precisely what Congress was trying to avoid. It is why Shimkus and others are now working to determine a responsible path forward on nuclear waste storage — a path that is based on science, not politics. To that end, he has called on his colleagues in the Senate, who have repeatedly blocked consideration and funding, to allow the licensing process to move forward.

Some have suggested that a political consensus is needed to pave the way forward for a permanent storage site. But storing nuclear waste properly and safely should not be a decision based on politics, but on science. In the case of Yucca Mountain, there is scientific consensus. It is time to set politics aside, fund the licensing of Yucca Mountain and remove nuclear waste from individual communities across the nation. Storing nuclear waste is too urgent of a public safety issue to be unaddressed by a gridlocked Congress.

