

Paducah leaders urge DOE for 10-year cleanup contract

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WASHINGTON -

The gaseous diffusion plant in Paducah played an important role for more than 60 years from fighting the cold war to enriching uranium. Now, the focus is on cleaning up the site.

There are more than 1,200 employees currently doing the decontamination and decommissioning. That number could increase for the next cleanup contract cycle, which our leaders hope to be for a longer term. But it's also a wish for business owners who rely on the workforce to keep them open.

Business has not always been as usual for Kenny Forthman. When word of plant layoffs reached his grocery store, he wasn't sure what to expect.

"Everybody got nervous about it, because they were thinking, 'Is it going to affect our business?'" Forthman says. He says business slowed down, but it didn't do him in.

Three years later, and with the creation of the cleanup jobs, his registers are ringing with activity.

"Electric bill is not going to go down. Our expenses aren't going to go down. But we lose customers, our income is going to go down," Forthman says.

And that's not what Paducah city leaders want to see.

They met with the U.S. Department of Energy Thursday afternoon to make sure the plant does not idle.

Fluor's program manager, Bob Smith, says a 10-year cleanup contract will keep employees from being constantly on the move.

"Folks are interested in long-term stability here, and this next contract I think we'll do that."

Fluor is the company that won the first bid for cleanup, and it plans to submit another bid this month.

Smith says having permanent jobs could also be an incentive for companies in recruiting.

"The more we can continue this cleanup mission and reduce those hazards, it reduces risk for the area so we want to clean up that Legacy Mission, but also support Paducah with stable employment," Smith says.

Back at Forthman's store, he's stocking his shelves, because it means people are investing in their own community.