

News from Around the Complex

August 1 – August 31, 2011

Available on-line at www.fftfcleanup.org

August 31, 2011

Contractor picks up pace of demolition, *Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog*

Demolition of the historic K-25 plant has resumed in a big way under the direction of the Department of Energy's new environmental contractor, URS/CH2M Oak Ridge (UCOR). At the time of its construction, K-25 was a mile long in a U shape and billed as the largest building in the world under one roof. The current focus is on the East Wing of the former uranium-enrichment facility that was built during World War II and operated until the early 1960s. The West Wing of K-25 was taken down by the previous contractor, Bechtel Jacobs Co., which completed that work in January 2010. Demolition activities were on hold until last month, when BJC started work on the East Wing just a couple of weeks before the transition to UCOR's management on Aug. 1. The new contractor has employed a revised strategy for demolishing the heavily contaminated and highly deteriorated facilities.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/aug/31/contractor-picks-up-pace-of-demolition/>

August 30, 2011

Vit plant budget doubted in review, *Tri-City Herald*

The Department of Energy may not be able to complete the Hanford vitrification plant for the projected \$12.2 billion, according to an internal DOE document. The \$12.2 billion figure is at risk due to uncertainties in congressional funding for the project, increased cost growth outpacing savings and delays in resolving technical waste mixing issues, according to a briefing document by the Construction Project Review team. However, a "refined approach to treating the small fraction" of the most difficult waste, which includes plutonium, could help curb cost growth, the document indicated. That could mean finishing the design of the plant to treat the majority of the waste and then continuing to work on studies for treating the most difficult waste. DOE has not released the briefing document, considering it "predecisional," but the document has been circulated outside Hanford by others. A formal report on the team's most recent review has not been written and could differ from the document prepared to brief officials after the team's latest visit to Hanford.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2011/08/30/1620617/vit-plant-budget-doubted-in-review.html#ixzz1WYdUboh1>

August 29, 2011

First Trupact-III Shipment Arrives Safely at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, *DOE Press Release*

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced today that the first shipment of transuranic waste using the newly approved shipping package known as the TRUPACT-III safely arrived at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, New Mexico. The shipment, which originated at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, arrived at WIPP on August 25. The new shipping package – the Transuranic Package Transporter Model 3 or TRUPACT-III – allows the Department to package and ship large-sized transuranic waste in a single box that would otherwise have to be broken down into smaller waste boxes. This new shipping package will help accelerate the pace of cleanup at sites across the country, while reducing risk to worker safety. "This announcement is a clear example of how ongoing innovations

within the Environmental Management program are helping to increase the efficiency of our operations, speed our cleanup efforts at Cold War sites across the country, and improve safety," said Dave Huizenga, DOE's Acting Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management.

<http://www.em.doe.gov/pdfs/First%20Trupact-III%20Shipment2.pdf>

August 29, 2011

DOE responds to state of Tennessee proposal: Thanks, but no thanks,

Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog

While negotiations have been going on for a new Tennessee Oversight Agreement between the U.S. Dept. of Energy and the Tenn. Dept. of Environment and Conservation, the Local Oversight Committee has been left out in the cold, so to speak. That's partly due to tight federal budgets and maybe other things, too. Anyway, the TDEC suggested a possible solution to the financial crunch. The state, along with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, fined the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge office earlier this summer for failing to meet milestones under the Federal Facility Agreement for some groundwater work at the East Tennessee Technology Park (site of the former K-25 uranium-enrichment operations). The fines would have been about \$150,000, split between EPA and TDEC. TDEC, in correspondence with DOE, suggested that maybe DOE would rather do a Supplemental Environmental Project rather than pay the fine to the state, and also suggested the money could be used for continued funding for the Local Oversight Committee (the amount is doubled when doing SEPs, so the dollar equivalent for the proposal would have been close to \$150,000.). But DOE said it didn't want to do that.

<http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2011/08/doe-says-thanks-but-no-thanks.html>

August 23, 2011

Nuclear site cleanup unnerves neighbors, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

The removal of nuclear waste at the former Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corp. waste dump is being met with mixed emotions by neighbors of the Parks Township site. "I'm deathly afraid," said Cindy Hill from inside her house, which sits no more than 200 feet from the site. "It's (the nuclear waste) already in there. They ought to just leave it alone." What Hill wants left alone are 10 trenches that sit under 44 acres where NUMEC dumped radioactive and chemical waste that was produced at its Apollo plant in the 1960s. It closed in 1970. NUMEC's former plant in Apollo produced nuclear fuel for submarines and power plants, as well as a range of nuclear products for the federal government and others. The current site owner is BWX Technologies. The Army Corps of Engineers and its contractor, Cabrera Services Inc., began Monday to train workers who will work on the project. According to Corps spokesman Dan Jones, excavation at the site, which will cost between \$150 million and \$180 million, will begin later this week. The cleanup is expected to take eight to 10 years.

http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/leadertimes/news/s_752915.html#ixzz1WYfso5ox

August 20, 2011

Laser Advances in Nuclear Fuel Stir Terror Fear, *New York Times*

Scientists have long sought easier ways to make the costly material known as enriched uranium — the fuel of nuclear reactors and bombs, now produced only in giant industrial plants. One idea, a half-century old, has been to do it with nothing more substantial than lasers and their rays of concentrated light. This futuristic approach has always proved too expensive and difficult for anything but laboratory experimentation. Until now. In a little-known effort, General Electric has successfully

tested laser enrichment for two years and is seeking federal permission to build a \$1 billion plant that would make reactor fuel by the ton.

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/science/earth/21laser.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=uranium&st=nyt

August 19, 2011

1,100 Hanford layoffs planned, *Tri-City Herald*

The Department of Energy has authorized its environmental cleanup contractors at Hanford to lay off up to 1,100 more workers in the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1. That's in addition to up to 1,985 layoffs already announced this year, the majority of which will be Sept. 29. Hanford started the year with about 12,000 employees, meaning the potential layoffs announced this year would cut jobs by about a quarter. That does not include the jobs at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, where about 50 jobs are expected to be trimmed from its staff of about 4,470 in Richland. The most recent projected layoffs are to prepare for the new fiscal year federal budget, which is expected to reduce Hanford's annual budget. The number of layoffs required will not be known until Congress passes a Hanford budget. The projected 1,100 new layoffs will start with up to 475 jobs at the Hanford tank farms, where 56 million gallons of radioactive waste awaiting treatment are stored in underground tanks. The last day of work for those employees will be no later than Oct. 13.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2011/08/19/1608413/1100-hanford-layoffs-planned.html#ixzz1Vs3tIzjk>

August 17, 2011

Matheson fears high-level N-waste could head to Utah, *Salt Lake Tribune*

The plan to store thousands of tons of nuclear waste in Utah's west desert could again surface after a federal panel suggested finding a temporary home for the spent fuel now piling up at reactors across the country. The Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future says in a draft report that a near-term solution for disposing of the waste would be to ship it to one or more temporary holding sites in the United States while Congress wrestles with finding a final burial site. The only site currently licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for such use lies 45 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. "My concern is the waste comes here," Rep. Jim Matheson said Wednesday. "That opportunity, which we assumed at one point we had closed off, it's not closed off anymore." Congress and the Bureau of Land Management had halted a previous plan to park some 40,000 tons of nuclear waste at the Skull Valley Band of Goshute Indians reservation, though a federal judge overturned two key Interior Department decisions that Utah officials had believed would block the waste from being stored on the land in Tooele County.

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/politics/52406515-90/waste-nuclear-site-utah.html.csp>

August 16, 2011

WIPP milestone: Panel 5 disposal operations complete, *Carlsbad Current-Argus*

CARLSBAD — Disposal operations in Panel 5 of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant underground repository are now complete, the U.S. Department of Energy announced this week. The final shipment of contact-handled transuranic waste, or CH-TRU, was placed in the panel in July, according to a news release from the U.S. DOE Carlsbad Field Office. The fifth out of a total of 10 panels in the WIPP underground configuration, the panel took two years to fill. "All TRU waste management employees at WIPP and the generator sites deserve the credit of this accomplishment," said J.R. Stroble, director of the National TRU Program. "It is through their dedication to performing their jobs safely, compliantly and timely that

WIPP and the TRU Waste Management Programs continues to be a success for the DOE," he said.

http://www.currentargus.com/ci_18696445

August 16, 2011

DOE told to take second look at vit plant safety culture, *Tri-City Herald*

Actions proposed by the Department of Energy to strengthen the nuclear safety culture at the Hanford vitrification plant represent a start, but DOE should take a closer look at the issue, said the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board in a letter released Monday. The defense board remains concerned that DOE does not agree with the findings of a defense board investigation into the nuclear safety culture of the plant. The safety culture concerns are related to the safe operation of the plant now under construction to turn radioactive waste into a stable glass form for disposal. "The disparity between the stated acceptance and disagreement with the findings makes it difficult for the board to assess the response," said the letter sent to Energy Secretary Steven Chu by defense board Chairman Peter Winokur on Friday.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2011/08/16/1604944/doe-told-to-take-second-look-at.html#ixzz1Vs4VUn3f>

August 15, 2011

Feds find nearly \$2M in fraudulent expenses at SRS, *Charlotte Observer*

COLUMBIA, S.C. Federal prosecutors say five people have been convicted and nearly \$2 million has been recovered in an investigation into fraudulent expense claims from stimulus money given to the Savannah River Site. U.S. Attorney Bill Nettles said they are the first convictions and civil settlements related to the Department of Energy's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The law awarded money to contractors helping clean up nuclear waste at the former nuclear weapons plant near Aiken.

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2011/08/03/2501551/feds-find-nearly-2m-in-fraudulent.html#ixzz1V775FJFn>

August 14, 2011

Safety doubts raised at U.S. nuclear waste cleanup project, *Los Angeles Times*

The Energy Department has asserted that Bechtel Corp. underplayed safety risks from equipment it is installing at the nation's largest nuclear waste cleanup project, according to government records. A federal engineering review team found in late July that Bechtel's safety evaluation of key equipment at the plant at the Hanford site in Washington state was incomplete and that "the risks are more serious" than Bechtel acknowledged when it sought approval to continue with construction, the documents say. Senior scientists at the site said in emails obtained by The Times that Bechtel's designs for tanks and mixing equipment are flawed, representing such a massive risk that work should be stopped on that part of the construction project.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-nuclear-defects-20110814,0,5490202.story>

August 14, 2011

Federal stimulus projects winding down at SRS, *Augusta Chronicle*

They came, they toiled -- and now most of them are gone. As the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act enters its final weeks, Savannah River Site's stimulus-funded cleanup projects are winding down. "They're wrapping up this month, and next month," said Jim Giusti, a Department of Energy spokesman at the site. The

\$1.6 billion windfall created or saved about 3,000 jobs and accelerated dozens of projects that might have languished for years before money became available to complete them. Defunct reactors were decommissioned and sealed; radioactive waste was repacked and shipped away; and obsolete, Cold War-era buildings were razed -- all part of a long-range plan to consolidate the site's operations into a much smaller area.

<http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/government/2011-08-14/federal-stimulus-projects-winding-down-srs>

August 13, 2011

\$115 billion needed to finish Hanford cleanup, *Tri-City Herald*

The Department of Energy has taken a look at all the environmental cleanup yet to be completed at the Hanford nuclear reservation and come up with a big price tag: \$115 billion. That's what it projects will be required to finish environmental cleanup in about 2060 and then prevent any intrusion into areas, such as landfills holding radioactive waste, until 2090. There has never been an exact figure on remaining cleanup costs, although estimates a few years ago put the cost at more than \$100 billion, said Ron Skinnarland, the section manager of waste management for the Washington State Department of Ecology, a Hanford regulator. DOE agreed that the cost and schedule is not far from estimates reported to Congress in January 2009. Hanford, a 586-square-mile site, is contaminated with radioactive and chemical waste from the past production of plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program. The report, the 2011 Hanford Lifecycle Scope, Schedule and Cost Report, is a new requirement of the legally binding Tri-Party Agreement, after DOE negotiated with the state and Environmental Protection Agency to extend some environmental cleanup deadlines.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2011/08/13/1602115/115b-needed-to-finish-hanford.html#ixzz1V49Nzjf5>

Report available at: <http://www.hanford.gov/>

August 11, 2011

Nuclear waste: time to learn, *Leader-Post (Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada)*

Nuclear power generates a lot of heat - and so does the issue of what to do with the waste product. Indeed, the idea that nuclear waste could one day be stored in northern Saskatchewan has prompted a protest walk that began in the northern community of Pinehouse July 27 and is expected to arrive in Regina next week. Organizers want the provincial government to pass legislation banning nuclear waste storage anywhere in the province. First, some background: In Canada, more than two million used nuclear fuel bundles have been produced over several decades by nuclear reactors in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. Those bundles are currently stored in secure containers in aboveground facilities at those reactor sites. *** Spent fuel rods will be hazardous to humans for hundreds of thousands of years, according to the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO), and their long-term safe storage requires something far more permanent than current facilities. In 2007, after much scientific study of all options, the Canadian government chose a plan to have all existing and future spent nuclear fuel bundles sealed in secure containers and buried deep underground "in a suitable rock formation".

<http://www.leaderpost.com/technology/Nuclear+waste+time+learn/5239024/story.html>

August 8, 2011

Plutonium plans in limbo, *Nature*

The Fukushima nuclear disaster, already casting a long shadow over the nuclear industry, has claimed another victim. Last week, Britain's Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) announced that it will close a troubled Sellafield facility that is one of only two commercial plants in the world producing mixed oxide nuclear fuel (MOX), after reactor shutdowns in Japan eliminated its only customers for the plutonium-containing fuel. "The reason for this [closure] is directly related to the tragic events in Japan and their ongoing impact on the power markets," says Tony Fountain, the NDA's chief executive. The decision is a setback for the British nuclear industry and leaves the country wondering anew what to do with the world's largest single stockpile of plutonium. MOX is created by combining uranium with plutonium extracted from spent reactor fuel or recycled from unused nuclear weapons. Proponents say that it provides a way to squeeze more energy out of uranium, reduce the volume of reactor waste, and destroy material that could otherwise be turned back into weapons. MOX accounts for 2% of the fuel burned in reactors around the world, 80% of it in France.

http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110808/full/476140a.html?WT.ec_id=NEWS-20110809 (article is free but requires signing up with email address)

August 7, 2011

Environmental risks at Oak Ridge and the battle for federal cleanup funds,
Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog

In a meeting last month with top state officials, including Gov. Bill Haslam and Bob Martineau, the commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, DOE environmental chief John Eschenberg said Oak Ridge has the "highest risk profile" of any Department of Energy cleanup site. And, he added, "Mercury (associated with discharges from Cold War production of thermonuclear weapons) is our No. 1 environmental threat on this site, and then you look at that in close proximity to the residents. Oak Ridge is a high-risk site." His comments, of course, were all in the context of competing with other sites to acquire the needed funding to get the Oak Ridge job done. Oak Ridge, he said, is unique among the DOE cleanup sites and that should be emphasized. Eschenberg further explained the situation at Oak Ridge and compared it to some of bigger sites in the DOE complex, such as the Hanford reservation in Washington State.

<http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2011/08/environmental-hazards-of-oak-r.html>

August 5, 2011

USEC project might be in danger, *Chillicothe Gazette*

PIKETON -- Plans to construct a centrifuge plant in Piketon could be canceled if USEC Inc. can't get a promise for a government loan within the next few weeks. In a markedly different tone than has existed up to this point, USEC CEO John Welch and Chief Fiscal Officer John Barpoulis conducted a telephone conference with investors Thursday morning after the release of the second quarter financial report. The men indicated a \$2 billion conditional loan guarantee from the U.S. Department of Energy was needed in the next few weeks or the company could not continue to sustain the American Centrifuge Project in the demonstration phase on the DOE's Piketon site. Welch said he shared stockholders' frustration that USEC has been awaiting a loan guarantee from the DOE for more than two years. In 2009, the company's loan application initially was denied, but the company was given another chance to apply.

<http://www.chillicothe Gazette.com/article/20110805/NEWS01/108050301/USEC-project-might-danger>

August 3, 2011

Federal inspectors cite SRS concerns, *Augusta Chronicle*

A federal oversight board has new concerns about dangerously corroded spent fuel from the world's first nuclear core meltdown a half century ago. The material, now stored at Savannah River Site's L Area, includes stainless steel clad fuel from the Sodium Reactor Experiment launched in California in the 1950s to determine if nuclear power could provide household electricity. The sodium-cooled reactor made history in 1957 by powering homes in nearby Moorpark, and two years later, after an accidental coolant blockage, became the first reactor to experience a meltdown. It was subsequently repaired before being shut down for good in 1964. Today, 36 cans of spent fuel from that project are among more than 15,000 used fuel assemblies stored at SRS, where their eventual disposition remains in limbo while the U.S. Energy Department struggles to reorganize the nation's nuclear waste management strategy.

<http://chronicle.augusta.com/latest-news/2011-08-03/federal-inspectors-cite-srs-concerns>

August 3, 2011

Changes to Savannah River Site tritium facility announced, *Augusta Chronicle*

The National Nuclear Security Administration on Wednesday announced a money-saving plan to modernize and consolidate tritium facilities at Savannah River Site. Although it is too early to forecast the impact on the 450 jobs directly assigned to the program, the plan is designed to lead to a combined cost savings and cost avoidance of hundreds of millions of dollars over the next two decades. "Part of this process is to take a look at activities we suspect we can do without in the future," said Doug Dearolph, the administration's Savannah River Site manager. The tritium program is one of the last nuclear weapons functions still based at SRS and includes periodic recharging of the tritium reservoirs in nuclear warheads. Tritium, a gas that increases explosive power, has a half-life of about 12½ years and requires recharging. Workers also extract tritium from fuel rods produced at Tennessee Valley Authority reactors and from both surplus and active warhead reservoirs.

<http://chronicle.augusta.com/latest-news/2011-08-03/srs-tritium-facility-changes-way?v=1312389524>

August 2, 2011

Blended waste decision is weeks away, regulator says, *Salt Lake Tribune*

A state regulator said Tuesday it will be at least a few weeks before a decision is made on allowing "down-blended" radioactive waste to be buried at the EnergySolutions' landfill in Tooele County. Rusty Lundberg, director of the Utah Division of Radiation Control, said the company answered a few additional questions his agency raised, and it will take a few weeks before any decision on whether the company will be asked to do an in-depth "performance assessment" before large volumes of blended waste roll into the disposal site. Blending involves diluting higher-concentration radioactive waste into waste with lower concentrations. The technique has been used to a limited extent for years, but it has become more attractive to the nuclear industry because of a shortage of disposal for classes B and C waste, which has radioactive-hazard levels too high for the Tooele County site. Utah lawmakers banned classes B and C waste in 2005, and the state Radiation Control Board opposes blending done "when the intent is to alter the waste classification for the purposes of disposal-site access."

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/politics/52313768-90/blended-blending-class-company.html.csp>

August 1, 2011

Colo. Wildlife Refuge With Nuclear Past Faces New Problems -- IG, *New York Times*

Preble's meadow jumping mouse, the mountain-loving sedge, the carrionflower greenbriar and the forktip three-awn all make their home in the 5,000 acres that is the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge. But the rare mouse and plant species also share space with the residual contaminants from the nuclear weapons production facility that once sat on the Colorado site. Since 2005 -- when the Department of Energy transferred the site to the Fish and Wildlife Service -- Rocky Flats has been mired in controversy, with local activists claiming that left-over plutonium poses a risk for nearby residents. A recent report from the Interior Department's inspector general adds another mark against the site: An invasive weed is quickly spreading through the refuge, displacing native species but also risking the migration of nuclear contaminants to surface water. FWS appears caught in a Catch-22. According to the report, the agency does not have the funds to take constant care of the site, but even if Congress appropriates new money, FWS may not be able to conduct its usual restoration methods because U.S. EPA has warned that the site's nuclear history could rule out the necessary plowing.

<http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2011/08/01/01greenwire-colo-wildlife-refuge-with-nuclear-past-faces-n-27122.html>

Report available at: <http://www.doioig.gov/images/stories/reports/pdf/C-IS-FWS-0017-2010Public.pdf>