

News from Around the Complex

December 1 – December 31, 2009

Available on-line at www.fffccleanup.org

December 27, 2009

16 million tons of uranium mill tailings moving away from Colorado River site, *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel*

Crews have taken the first bites out of the old uranium mill-tailings pile in Moab, Utah, beginning a years-long process of transferring it far from the Colorado River. About 630,000 tons will have been moved from Moab to the disposal cell near Crescent Junction by year's end, said Wendee Ryan of the U.S. Department of Energy. The Energy Department and its contractor, Energy Solutions Corp., began moving the tailings pile this year. Moab residents and downstream water providers lobbied for years to have the 16-million-ton pile of mill tailings moved from its spot along the north bank of the Colorado River to a cell up against the Bookcliff Mountains at Crescent Junction that is deemed less likely to contaminate the river.

http://www.gjsentinel.com/hp/content/news/stories/2009/12/27/122809_3a_Mill_tailings.html

December 24, 2009

EnergySolutions Defends Foreign Nuclear Waste Plan: EnergySolutions, Utah congressman spar over proposal to dispose of foreign nuclear waste, *ABC News*

EnergySolutions Inc. has started airing commercials critical of a U.S. congressman who wants to prevent the company from importing Italian nuclear waste for disposal in Utah's west desert. The company is fighting a bill in Congress sponsored by U.S. Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, that would ban the importation of foreign low-level radioactive waste unless it originated in the U.S. or served a strategic national purpose. EnergySolutions contends jobs will be put at risk if it isn't allowed to dispose of the waste at its facility west of Salt Lake City. Meanwhile, Matheson said that any country that creates nuclear waste should dispose of it itself.

The two argued Wednesday at separate news conferences over a mailer Matheson sent to constituents in support of his bill and a commercial aired in response on Sunday by EnergySolutions. The bill was written to block the company's plans to import up to 20,000 tons of waste from Italy's shuttered nuclear power program through the ports of either Charleston, S.C., or New Orleans. After processing in Tennessee, about 1,600 tons would be disposed of in Utah.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory?id=9416204>

December 24, 2009

DOE to Study Storage Options for Spent Nuclear Fuel, Small Reactors – Official, *New York Times*

The Energy Department is close to naming a blue-ribbon committee to consider new policies for dealing with spent nuclear reactor fuel but has further to go in completing negotiations on loan guarantees for a first group of new nuclear reactors, Deputy Energy Secretary Daniel Poneman said. Poneman also said he is interested in the possibilities for development of smaller modular nuclear reactors, calling this a potentially important carbon policy option in the United States and abroad. "I certainly agree with the premise that small, modular reactors are a very interesting path to explore," Poneman said in an interview this week. Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, is preparing legislation requiring DOE to develop and demonstrate two designs for small modular nuclear plants of less than 350 megawatts capacity, in partnership with private industry. Such smaller reactor models may be needed if costs of full-sized reactors continue to escalate, Bingaman said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/cwire/2009/12/24/24climatewire-doe-to-study-storage-options-for-spent-nucle-97694.html>

December 24, 2009

Court: nuclear spent fuel can be stored at plants, *San Francisco Chronicle*

A federal appeals court has refused a request by several states to force the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to declare spent fuel pools at nuclear power plants a serious environmental threat. The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Monday in Manhattan. It denied appeals by New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts that it review the NRC's rejection of a request by Massachusetts and California that it raise the risk level.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2009/12/21/state/n150942S20.DTL&type=science#ixzz0bDCNd9U3>

December 23, 2009

Magnum Minerals will buy WIPP salt, *Amarillo News*

The Energy Department's Carlsbad Field Office has reached an agreement to sell salt from the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, N.M., to a Hereford company that will use it as a livestock feed supplement. In 2008, Washington TRU Solutions issued a request for interest in salt tailings that have accumulated on the surface at the WIPP site since mining began in the 1970s. Through the years, uncontaminated salt has been mined from the WIPP Plant, which stores radioactive waste in rooms mined from ancient salt formations 2,150 feet below the surface, according to information from the Department of Energy. WIPP, which began waste-disposal operations in 1999, is 26 miles outside Carlsbad.

http://www.amarillo.com/stories/122309/bus_biz2.shtml

December 22, 2009

Depleted uranium arrives in EnergySolutions' Clive facility from South Carolina, *Deseret News*

The first of three shipments of depleted uranium has arrived via rail at EnergySolutions' facility in Clive, Tooele County. Company President Val Christensen made the announcement Monday and said the shipment arrived pursuant to the agreement reached late last week between Utah Gov. Gary Herbert and the U.S. Department of Energy, requiring EnergySolutions to put in additional safety measures before burying the material. The 3,500 tons of radioactive waste arrived at 9 p.m. Sunday after being shipped by rail from the Savannah River site in South Carolina. Two additional shipments, which will bring the total amount of waste to 10,500 tons, are scheduled in the coming months as the company puts in new safeguards to ensure the material's safe disposal.

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705353136/Depleted-uranium-arrives-in-EnergySolutions-Clive-facility-from-South-Carolina.html>

See NFAC Article Below (December 18- Salt Lake Tribune)

December 22, 2009

Yucca Mountain Project experiencing brain drain, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*

WASHINGTON -- The acting head of the Yucca Mountain Project is retiring at the end of the month along with another top official, the latest to depart the shrinking nuclear waste program, the Department of Energy confirmed. Christopher Kouts, 59, worked in a variety of management and technical jobs during 24 years on the project. He was the No. 2 manager and became acting director of the Office of Civilian

Radioactive Waste Management in January after the departure of Director Ward Sproat. Russ Dyer, 62, the project's chief scientist, also has announced retirement effective the end of the year, the department said. Further, Allen Benson, the project's director of communications and outreach, said he will be retiring "within the next couple of months." They are in the latest wave of departures as the Department of Energy ratchets down its effort to build a nuclear waste repository at the once-booming desert site 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

<http://www.lvrj.com/news/yucca-mountain-project-experiencing-brain-drain-79883322.html>

December 20, 2009

DOE scraps cheaper waste treatment plan, *Tri-City Herald*

The Department of Energy has dropped a proposal for a less expensive alternative to treating and disposing of some of Hanford's radioactive tank waste. The alternative could have saved as much as \$459 million, according to figures in an earlier Government Accountability Office report, but Hanford officials were unable to win the regulatory support of the states of Washington and New Mexico. About \$40 million has been spent on the project. Less than two months ago, DOE released a draft environmental impact study that included the less expensive option of sending some of Hanford's tank waste to a federal repository in New Mexico rather than glassifying it at the \$12.2 billion vitrification plant being built at Hanford.

http://www.tri-cityherald.com/kennewick_pasco_richland/story/836734.html

December 18, 2009

Notice of Modifications to the Preferred Alternatives for Tank Waste Treatment and Disposal of Off Site Waste in the Draft Tank Closure and Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement for the Hanford Site, *Federal Register Notice*

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is modifying its preferred alternatives for tank waste treatment and also for disposal of off-site waste in the Draft Tank Closure and Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement for the Hanford Site, Richland, Washington (Draft EIS, DOE/ EIS-00391), made available for public comment on October 30, 2009 (74 FR 56194). *** DOE is now expressing its preference that no Hanford tank wastes would be shipped to WIPP.

*** Although the Draft EIS considers the cumulative impacts of the potential receipt of GTCC LLW at Hanford, DOE is preparing a separate EIS on GTCC LLW disposition. However, similar to its preference regarding the importation of LLW and MLLW, DOE announces that it does not prefer to import GTCC LLW to Hanford at least until the WTP is operational.

<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/E9-30173.htm>

December 18, 2009

IG report on 'DOE's Management Challenges', *Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog*

On an annual basis, the Dept. of Energy's Office of Inspector General is required to identify what it considers the management challenges faced by the broadly missioned federal agency headed by Secretary Steven Chu. Many of those challenges, of course, are reported during the course of [the] year by the IG's many audits and investigations. "Responsible for some of the Nation's most important and technically advanced missions, the Department of Energy faces an array of challenges that are more wide-ranging and complex than at any time in its history," the IG report said in its summary opening.

http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2009/12/ig_report_on_does_management_c.html

Full report available at: <http://www.ig.energy.gov/documents/IG-0832.pdf>

December 18, 2009

DOE to curb K-27 work, shift Recovery Act money, *Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog*

A Dept. of Energy official confirmed this afternoon that the agency plans to cut short the Recovery Act-funded work on the K-27 decommissioning project and shift the money to other work -- quite possibly demolition of the K-33 building. The news was first reported by Mike Nartker of Weapons Complex Monitor, a Washington-based newsletter that covers environmental cleanup at DOE sites. A DOE official in Oak Ridge confirmed that the agency had made a decision to "stop the vast majority of the work on K-27" and look at other projects. He said demolition of K-33 is "a leading candidate, a very attractive candidate."

http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2009/12/doe_to_curb_k-27_work_shift_re.html

December 18, 2009

Utah gov strikes deal on radioactive waste, *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Gov. Gary Herbert and the U.S. Energy Department have hammered out a deal that would allow a shipment of depleted uranium on its way to Utah to keep coming to the state but only for storage, not for permanent disposal -- yet. The deal will suspend future shipments of the waste from the government's Savannah River cleanup in South Carolina, Herber said. The trains would start rolling and the stored depleted uranium would only go into the ground after the state completes a safety review that is now under way. Herbert secured the agreement today, two days after a shipment of 5,400 barrels of DU, as the waste is often called, had already rolled out of the South Carolina site. "None of this waste will be disposed of until the [state's] new, conservative criteria [for DU disposal] are in place," said Frank Marcinowski, deputy assistant secretary for regulatory compliance in the Energy Department's environmental management office. When the trainload of DU arrives in Utah early next week, the barrels will be unloaded from the train and stored on site until the state finalizes two new requirements.

http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_14019634

See Previous NFAC Article (December 11, 2009): http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_13972681

December 16, 2009

Depleted uranium coming to Oak Ridge in April, *Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog*

News reports this week indicated that the Department of Energy is proceeding with plans to ship about 15,000 drums of depleted uranium from Savannah River to Utah for disposal, despite the objections of the state's leadership. AP reported earlier this week that Utah Gov. Gary Herbert had asked Energy Secretary Steven Chu to intervene. Meanwhile, about 800 drums of Savannah River's DU stockpile will be coming to Oak Ridge. "Currently, the depleted uranium is scheduled to be shipped to Oak Ridge in April 2010," DOE spokesman John Shewairy said in an e-mail response this week. DOE contractors are planning to use the depleted uranium from Savannah River to mixed with stocks of U-233 and downblend the material to reduce its fission capability and prepare it for disposal.

http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2009/12/depleted_uranium_coming_to_oak.html

December 14, 2009

YUCCA MOUNTAIN: Licensing efforts continue, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*

Department of Energy lawyers are forging ahead with their defense of a license application to build the nation's nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain. They met a deadline last week for filing briefs on

questions that Nevada's attorneys raised with a nuclear regulatory panel, which is tracking safety concerns about plans for turning the mountain, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, into a burial site for 77,000 tons of highly radioactive waste. The briefs were filed with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board despite the Obama administration's stance that Yucca Mountain is no longer an option for a repository. An internal DOE memo that surfaced last month also stated, "All license defense activities will be terminated in December 2009."

<http://www.lvrj.com/news/licensing-efforts-continue-79202892.html>

December 13, 2009

Nuclear Site Finds Money Can Bring Headaches, *New York Times*

AIKEN, S.C. — There is a phenomenon known as the lottery winner's curse, where those who suddenly strike it rich do not live happily ever after. If the experience at the Savannah River Site here is any guide, something like it may threaten the winners of stimulus bonanzas. Earlier this year, the nuclear site won one of the biggest pots of stimulus money, \$1.6 billion, to accelerate its cleanup of radioactive waste left behind after decades of producing materials for the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile. But the pressure to spend the money quickly and effectively has led to a series of bitter disputes among officials that burst into public view this fall after the tensions reached critical mass.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/13/science/earth/13savannah.html?_r=1&sq=nuclear%20site&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=print

See Related Report: *CD-2 External Independent Review of Environmental Management P Area and R Area Completion Projects at the Savannah River Site* (September 14, 2009)

Report Available at: <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/us/report1.pdf>

December 12, 2009

DOE drills wells to test for the movement of nuclear waste across the Clinch River, *WBIR* (Knoxville)

The Department of Energy is drilling a series of wells south of the Clinch River to ensure no nuclear waste from Oak Ridge has migrated underground into its neighbors' backyards along Jones Road. "We have not found any evidence of any contamination south of the river," said David Adler with the Department of Energy. "This is completely a precautionary measure." North of the Clinch River on DOE property is where nuclear waste was buried from the 1940s until the '80s. The groundwater in this area is known to be contaminated from the hazardous materials. However, recently there were signs that the material may be moving towards the river.

<http://www.wbir.com/news/green/story.aspx?storyid=107592&catid=137>

December 11, 2009

DOE: Trainloads of nuke waste on way to Utah, *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Trainloads of depleted uranium will soon be on the move, rolling over the objections of critics on their way to a Utah burial site. A Department of Energy official on Thursday informed U.S. Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, that 11,000 tons of the low-level radioactive waste -- packed in 14,800 drums -- is ready to be shipped from the Savannah River cleanup in South Carolina. Rubbish from bomb-making and enrichment, the Savannah River waste will be buried at EnergySolutions Inc.'s specialized landfill in Tooele County. Both state and federal regulators are looking at what measures are needed to make sure shallow disposal sites like EnergySolutions' can safely contain large amounts of DU, as depleted uranium is often called.

http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_13972681

December 11, 2009

NRC SEEKS COMMENT, PLANS PUBLIC MEETINGS ON BLENDING OF LOW-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE, *NRC Press Release*

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is seeking public comment on issues associated with blending of low-level radioactive waste and is planning public meetings to discuss blending in Rockville, Md. The issue of blending low-level radioactive waste has received increased attention from the nuclear industry since the 2008 closing of the Barnwell, S.C., low-level waste disposal site. This action left waste generators in 36 states with no disposal options for Class B and Class C wastes, the two classes of low-level waste with higher radioactivity. Blending in some cases can lower the classification of the wastes to the lower-radioactivity Class A, which has available disposal capacity, by reducing the concentration of radionuclides.

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/news/2009/09-199.html>

December 9, 2009

McCain says funds for Hanford are wasted, *Tri-City Herald*

The nearly \$2 billion in stimulus money being spent on environmental cleanup at the Hanford nuclear reservation made a list of questionable spending released Tuesday by Republican Sen. John McCain. "Hanford nuclear site gets billions for failed cleanup effort," said the stimulus checklist that the former presidential candidate prepared with fellow Republican Sen. Tom Coburn. The list included 100 projects, with Hanford at No. 10, which the senators said represented "billions of dollars of stimulus funding that have been wasted, mismanaged or directed toward silly and shortsighted projects." But Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who fought to get the money for Hanford, dismissed McCain's list as "political posturing of the worst kind."

http://www.tri-cityherald.com/kennewick_pasco_richland/story/822699.html

December 7, 2009

Special Report: Selected Department of Energy Program Efforts to Implement the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, *Office of the Inspector General, DOE*

[Background from DOE-IG Memorandum to the Secretary] The Department's program offices included in our review identified risks and planned mitigation strategies that, if successfully implemented and executed, should help achieve the goals and objectives of the Recovery Act. While each office identified risks unique to its respective areas of responsibility, there were a number of risks shared in common. These included the mechanical and substantive requirements related to the award and distribution of funds; program and project performance monitoring; and, program and project execution activities. In particular, the offices self-identified common risks such as:

- The inability to award and distribute funds in a timely manner to achieve the goals of the Recovery Act;
- The sufficiency of monitoring procedures and resources to, among other things, prevent and detect fraud, waste and abuse throughout the performance period of financial assistance awards and contracts; and,
- The inherent cost, schedule and performance risks associated with first-of-a-kind, innovative research and demonstration projects.

Report Available at: <http://www.ig.energy.gov/documents/OAS-RA-10-03.pdf>

See Related Reports from DOE-IG:

Department of Energy's Efforts to Meet Accountability and Performance Reporting Objectives of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (September 2009)

<http://www.ig.energy.gov/documents/OAS-RA-09-04.pdf>

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act at the Department of Energy (March 2009)

<http://www.ig.energy.gov/documents/OAS-RA-09-01-New508-G.pdf>

December 6, 2009

Demolition of first Hanford processing canyon begins, *Tri-City Herald*

Work is under way at Hanford to prepare the first huge processing canyon in the Department of Energy's nationwide nuclear weapons complex for demolition. DOE approved a plan for demolishing U Plant in central Hanford in 2005, but then decided to focus its budget on environmental cleanup closest to the Columbia River first. But with \$1.96 billion in federal economic stimulus money allocated to Hanford, DOE has been able to begin preparing U Plant to be torn down. It's one of five processing plants at the Hanford nuclear reservation built to chemically separate plutonium from fuel rods irradiated in Hanford reactors for the nation's nuclear weapons program. The plants often are called canyons because of their high ceilings, narrow width and walls as long as the Seattle Space Needle is tall.

http://www.tri-cityherald.com/kennewick_pasco_richland/story/819071.html

December 4, 2009

Waste solution: Senate must ban radioactive imports, *Salt Lake City Tribune*

[Editorial] The U.S. House sent a message to Italy, to Utah-based EnergySolutions, and to the world Wednesday -- the United States will not be a dumping ground for other nations' radioactive waste. By a vote of 309-112, members wisely approved the Radioactive Import Deterrence Act, which bans radioactive waste imports. Co-sponsored by Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, and Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, the measure aims to tame EnergySolutions' international business aspirations. The company is seeking a license from the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission to import 20,000 tons of contaminated materials from Italy's nuclear power industry. The waste would be processed at the firm's recycling facility in Tennessee, and 1,600 tons of leftovers would land in the company's low-level radioactive waste disposal facility in Tooele County, the only repository available for waste from 36 states.

http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/ci_13929407

December 3, 2009

Plutonium Finishing Plant removes last of high-risk material, *Tri-City Herald*

HANFORD — The last of the nuclear materials requiring high security has been removed from Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant. "It eliminates the need for special security requirements for deactivation and decommissioning workers at the Plutonium Finishing Plant," said Geoff Tyree, spokesman for the Department of Energy. "It becomes like any other facility at the Hanford Site going through D and D." Work is under way to clean out and demolish the Plutonium Finishing Plant as part of the environmental cleanup of Hanford, where plutonium was produced for the nation's nuclear weapons program. But security at the plant in central Hanford has been some of the tightest at the nuclear reservation because of materials stored there. Workers had to pass through metal detectors when they arrived at the plant and materials taken out of the plant had to be scanned for security.

http://www.tri-cityherald.com/kennewick_pasco_richland/story/815411.html

December 3, 2009

Oak Ridge incinerator shuttered, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE - The Department of Energy's Oak Ridge incinerator, which burned more than 35 million pounds of toxic waste over the past two decades, was shut down permanently Wednesday. Dennis Hill, a spokesman for Bechtel Jacobs Co., DOE's environmental manager, confirmed that the incinerator was turned off at 9:43 a.m., a couple of hours after the last waste was fed into the treatment systems. DOE had vowed to close the incinerator on multiple occasions in years past, but extended the operations in order to treat additional waste coming to Oak Ridge from cleanup sites around the United States. The incinerator was designed to burn mixed wastes containing both hazardous chemicals - including polychlorinated biphenyls - and radioactive elements.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2009/dec/03/or-incinerator-shuttered/>

December 2, 2009

Report: Yucca Mountain costs double other alternatives, *Las Vegas Sun-Times*

WASHINGTON -- A government report released today said developing Yucca Mountain would cost twice as much as other options for storing nuclear waste, but that both interim and on-site storage alternatives would face long-term costs and potential political pitfalls. The report comes the day after a longtime advocate of nuclear power said during a speech in Washington that the Yucca Mountain project is dead. Nevada's lawmakers said the developments are more evidence that the proposed nuclear waste dump 90 miles north of Las Vegas will not be built. "This \$100 billion dinosaur's days are numbered," Democratic Rep. Shelley Berkley said in a statement. "It's long past time those who produced this nuclear garbage take responsibility for finding a real solution to this issue." Former Sen. Pete Domenici, the New Mexico Republican who had been chairman of two powerful committees handling Yucca Mountain issues, said during a talk Tuesday at the National Press Club that it was time to consider alternatives to Yucca Mountain.

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2009/dec/02/report-yucca-mountain-costs-double-other-alternati/>

Full text of GAO report available at: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1048.pdf>