

News from Around the Complex

January 1 – January 31, 2012

Available on-line at www.fffcleanup.org

January 30, 2012

Energy Department rejects SRS advisory board request for nuclear waste inventory, *Augusta Chronicle*

The U.S. Energy Department has rejected an oversight board's request that federal officials maintain a more comprehensive status report on Savannah River Site's growing volume and variety of stored nuclear waste. "SRS was never intended, studied or tested to be a long term repository for nuclear wastes and by-products," the SRS Citizens Advisory Board's request said. "Recent developments related to the Yucca Mountain Repository have raised the level of concern about how DOE plans to meet its commitments to SRS stakeholders i.e., to expeditiously disposition waste from SRS to a designated national repository." The 25-person board asked for a one-time preliminary report that would include more details on both nuclear and hazardous wastes in L Basin, the H and F area tank farms, K Area, Glass Waste Storage Building and other areas. * * * In a Jan. 19 response sent to Board Chairman Donald Bridges, SRS site manager David C. Moody said federal officials would not comply with the request. * * * The Energy Department, he said, believes current disclosures and periodic presentations to the board and to the public "provide the information needed to support a forum for open discussions regarding government plans, actions and decisions."

<http://chronicle.augusta.com/latest-news/2012-01-30/energy-department-rejects-srs-advisory-board-request-nuclear-waste-inventory?v=1327919627>

January 26, 2012

Revamped Search Urged for a Nuclear Waste Site, *New York Times Blog*

WASHINGTON — A commission appointed to find alternatives to a failed plan to store nuclear waste in the Nevada desert declared on Thursday that the United States would have to develop a "consent-based approach" for choosing a site because leaving the decision to Congress had failed. By securing local consent, the panel said, the government might avoid the kind of conflicts that led to the cancellation of plans to create a repository at Yucca Mountain, a site 100 miles from Las Vegas, in 2010. It noted that local willingness had been crucial to decision-making on sites for nuclear waste depots in Finland, France, Spain and Sweden. The panel, the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future, also suggested that the government, which assumed responsibility for high-level waste 30 years ago, take the job of managing the waste out of the hands of the Energy Department and gives it to a federally chartered corporation created for that purpose.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/27/science/earth/nuclear-waste-panel-urges-consent-based-approach.html?_r=1

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

January 22, 2012

Cost savings proposed for MOX project at Savannah River Site, *Augusta Chronicle*

The government's \$4.8 billion quest to rid itself of tons of high-grade plutonium from old nuclear bombs is veering in new directions this year. The broad plan is to build a mammoth mixed oxide, or "MOX" plant at Savannah River Site, where the material will be rendered forever unusable in weapons by blending it into commercial nuclear

reactor fuel. That construction project, entering its sixth year, is moving ahead as planned, said Peter Hanlon, the National Nuclear Security Administration's assistant deputy administrator for fissile materials disposition. * * * Although the fuel factory itself is progressing much as it was envisioned a decade ago, the newest changes under consideration focus on how and where the plutonium "pits" from obsolete warheads will be dismantled and converted to a powder suitable for use in the MOX plant. Previous pit disassembly options called for a freestanding building near the MOX complex. Later discussions focused on housing that function in the vacant K Reactor at Savannah River Site. The newest plan, disclosed in a recent Federal Register notice, proposes a cost-saving combination of four separate facilities, including the MOX plant itself.

<http://m.chronicle.augusta.com/news/aiken/2012-01-22/cost-savings-proposed-mox-project-savannah-river-site>

January 18, 2012

Problems plague cleanup at Hanford nuclear waste site, *USA TODAY*

HANFORD SITE, Wash. – Seven decades after scientists came here during World War II to create plutonium for the first atomic bomb, a new generation is struggling with an even more daunting task: cleaning up the radioactive mess. The U.S. government is building a treatment plant to stabilize and contain 56 million gallons of waste left from a half-century of nuclear weapons production. The radioactive sludge is so dangerous that a few hours of exposure could be fatal. A major leak could contaminate water supplies serving millions across the Northwest. The cleanup is the most complex and costly environmental restoration ever attempted.

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/environment/story/2012-01-25/hanford-nuclear-plutonium-cleanup/52622796/1>

January 18, 2012

DOE set to cut county \$3.8M check, *Pahrump Valley Times*

Nye County will receive \$3.8 million in Payment Equal to Taxes from the U.S. Department of Energy, a lucrative source of county revenue that had all but disappeared when President Obama announced he would zero out funding for Yucca Mountain in January 2010. A letter from Peter Lyons, DOE assistant secretary for nuclear energy, said the payment is according to an agreement with Nye County in which DOE agrees to pay the county 3 percent of total funds appropriated for nuclear waste disposal up to \$300 million, an agreement which doesn't expire until June 30, 2013. The DOE also made reference to Section 116 of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, which sets up the formula for payments. Congress included funding for nuclear waste in a series of continuing resolutions that ended April 15, 2011. No funds were appropriated for nuclear waste activities after that.

<http://pvtimes.com/news/doe-set-to-cut-county-3-8m-check/>

January 18, 2012

Federal panel faults Idaho lab for radiation exposure mishap, *Reuters*

The radiation exposure of 16 workers at a nuclear research lab in Idaho stemmed from a failure to properly assess the risks posed by the handling of decades-old plutonium fuel cells, federal investigators concluded on Wednesday. In its report on the November 8 mishap at the Idaho National Laboratory, the U.S. Energy Department's Office of Health, Safety and Security also found the lab erred in not activating its emergency plan sooner after the accident, a delay that may have compromised medical treatment of the workers. The panel recommended the lab conduct a fresh assessment of "the likelihood, severity and risk of accidents," as well as the effectiveness of hazard controls at the deactivated reactor where the exposure

occurred. The Idaho National Laboratory, occupying 890 square miles in eastern Idaho, is the Energy Department's leading nuclear research center, employing some 6,000 government workers and contractors.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/19/us-nuclear-idaho-idUSTRE80I05W20120119>

January 18, 2012

Blended waste decision now up for public comment, *Salt Lake Tribune*

The Utah Division of Radiation Control began to take comments Tuesday on blended radioactive waste. The comment period gives members of the public an opportunity to weigh in on the division's decision that EnergySolutions Inc. can bury up to 40,000 cubic feet of blended waste each year in its Tooele County landfill while regulators review the long-term safety of even larger quantities of blended waste. Comments will be accepted through February 17. State and company officials say the blended waste can have a radioactive concentration no higher than the waste that is currently allowed: Class A waste. But critics have said allowing blended waste violates state policy, which bans any waste more concentrated than Class A.

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/53323034-78/waste-blended-utah-state.html.csp>

January 17, 2012

Plans for uranium de-conversion plant move forward for International Isotopes of Idaho Falls, *Idaho Statesman*

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has started the public comment period on the draft environmental impact statement for International Isotopes's planned depleted uranium de-conversion facility in New Mexico. Idaho Falls-based International Isotopes Inc. is in the licensing and design phase of an environmentally friendly, green technology, uranium de-conversion and fluorine extraction processing facility near Hobbs, N.M., where a public hearing will be held February 2. Comments on the project will be taken until February 27. "The NRC currently anticipates completion of this licensing process and issuing the license for the facility in mid to late summer of 2012," Steve T. Laflin, president and CEO, said. "In the next few months, the exact timing of the NRC license issuance will become much clearer and allow the company to complete financing and start construction on this important project."

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/2012/01/17/1956376/plans-for-uranium-de-conversion.html#storylink=cpy>

January 17, 2012

Report: Hanford Tanks May Have More Plutonium Than Estimated, *KUOW (Seattle)*

RICHLAND, Wash. – The Hanford Nuclear Reservation's tank farms in southeast Washington may have much more plutonium than earlier estimated. That's according to a report by a Hanford contractor that's just been leaked to public radio. At least one high-level Hanford official worries the findings could mean a massive waste treatment plant's design might need to be altered. Hanford officials had estimated there were about 10 kilograms of plutonium in the site's 56-million gallons of radioactive sludge. That waste is stored in aging underground tanks near the Columbia River. There have been several studies and independent reviews by top experts. This previously unreleased report reveals new information based on still-classified historical documents. Now, that 10-kilogram estimate has risen to at least 30 kilograms and as much as 130 kilograms of plutonium. To put that in perspective: The bomb dropped on Nagasaki carried just over 6 kilograms of plutonium.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=145321419&ft=3&f=145321419>

January 14, 2012

Vit plant workers bite their tongues, assessment says, *Tri-City Herald*

A significant number of federal and contractor staff on the Hanford vitrification plant project reported they were reluctant to raise safety or quality concerns, according to a new assessment of safety culture at the project released Friday. The Department of Energy's Office of Health, Safety and Security, HSS, conducted the review as follow-up to an initial review released in October, and the follow-up included a stronger message calling for improvements. The latest review by DOE's health and safety organization, which is independent of the DOE organization responsible for Hanford, found some Bechtel National groups believed fear of retaliation inhibited identification of problems at the vitrification plant. The plant is being built to turn radioactive waste left from plutonium weapons production into a stable glass form for disposal in 2019. Its safe operation could be jeopardized if design and construction work now do not meet high standards of quality, the new report stated. <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2012/01/14/1786525/vit-plant-workers-bite-their-tongues.html#storylink=cpy>

Report available at:

http://www.hss.doe.gov/IndepOversight/docs/reports/semevals/Final_Hanford_WTP-Report_Jan%202012.pdf

January 13, 2012

Draft report: Problems with vit plant quality control, potential overpayment, *Tri-City Herald*

Quality assurance procedures were not always followed for vessels inside Hanford's vitrification plant black cells, where no inspections or maintenance can be done for 40 years because of high radiation levels, according to a draft report of a Department of Energy Inspector General audit. "The importance of ... black cell and hard-to-reach components cannot be overstated," the draft report said. "Premature failure of these components could potentially contaminate large portions of a multi-billion dollar facility and interrupt waste processing for an unknown period of time." In addition, DOE might have overpaid contractor Bechtel National for some work related to black cell tanks or vessels, the draft said. No record has been found to show that \$15 million was returned, it said. The draft of the audit report was distributed to Bechtel and DOE for fact checking and then leaked to several media outlets, including the Herald. Changes could be made to the final draft, which also will include a DOE response laying out steps it will take to address audit recommendations.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2012/01/13/1785279/draft-report-problems-with-vit.html#storylink=cpy>

January 13, 2012

Senator: Send used nuclear fuel rods here, *Arizona Daily Sun*

PHOENIX -- State Sen. Al Melvin admits that not everyone thinks having a nuclear waste processing plant and burial site in Arizona is a great idea. So the Republican from Tucson's far-north suburbs has a sweetener he believes will get some people to change their minds: Money. He is proposing to make Arizona as the place where all the nuclear plants in the country send their spent nuclear fuel rods. Melvin, a long-time proponent of nuclear energy, said the failure of the federal government to set up a planned high-level radioactive waste dump at Yucca Mountain in Nevada creates an opportunity for Arizona. More to the point, Melvin said the technology to reprocess that fuel is already available -- and being used in France -- to reduce the amount of waste that eventually will have to be buried in the state. And he said

Arizona has many underground salt deposits that would make a perfect place for storage.

http://azdailysun.com/news/local/state-and-regional/senator-send-used-nuclear-fuel-rods-here/article_7378ba55-a7ed-5e6f-bae3-34c1674dafbc.html#ixzz1jknQYNOj

January 11, 2012

TDEC accepts 10% cut in DOE oversight funding; new five-year agreement in place, *Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog*

As reported last year, when the Tennessee Oversight Agreement was due to expire, the Department of Energy wanted to reduce the amount of DOE funding that went to the state for environmental oversight of activities on the government's Oak Ridge reservation. DOE was concerned about increasing pressures on the federal budget at the national level and the flowdown of that pressure. Well, a new five-year TOA was ultimately signed in September and a couple of months later the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation agreed to a 10 percent cut in its annual funding from DOE. (Funding to the state began in 1991 as a way to offset the hardship and expense of monitoring the large-scale environmental problems in Oak Ridge.) John Owsley, director of TDEC's oversight office in Oak Ridge, said an agreement on the funding level was finalized in November. Under terms of that agreement, TDEC's funding dropped from \$5.18 million in FY 2011 to \$4.71 million in FY 2012.

<http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2012/01/tdec-accepts-10-cut-in-doe-fun.html>

January 5, 2012

USEC Might Return Plant Facilities to DOE in May, *West Kentucky Star*

PADUCAH, KY - There is a possibility that USEC might turn over its facilities at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant to the Department of Energy in May, unless a trio of issues are resolved. That was the view expressed in a letter that USEC sent to the DOE and its employees on Dec. 22, according to Steve Penrod, USEC Vice President. The letter was intended to make sure the DOE was aware of their situation, since there is uncertainty about its arrangements with TVA for electrical power, future demand for product, and the potential re-enrichment of depleted uranium tails. USEC is putting together a contingency plan, just in case. The letter stated the company had not yet made a decision on extending its operation in Paducah, with 1,200 employees. USEC Spokeswoman Georgann Lookofsy told the Paducah Sun that the letter has nothing to do with employee or company performance. USEC's contract with TVA for power expires in May, and they receive significant rate reductions for the massive amount of electricity they consume.

<http://www.westkentuckystar.com/News/Local---Regional/McCracken-County/USEC-Might-Return-Plant-Facilities-to-DOE-in-May>

January 5, 2012

Next phase for French geological disposal, *World Nuclear News*

Industrial design work is set to begin for a deep geological repository for France's high- and intermediate-level radioactive waste following the signing of a contract between French radioactive waste agency Andra and a joint venture of two engineering companies. Andra has signed a six-year contract with Gaiya, a joint venture of Technip and Ingérop, as main contractor to project manage the conceptual and front-end phases of the Centre Industriel de Stockage Géologique project, dubbed 'Cigeo'. The facility will provide final storage for the most radioactive of France's waste, mostly from its nuclear power plant operations and used fuel

reprocessing. The first conceptual study phase is to be conducted during this year and will lead on to a public consultation that will take place in 2013.

http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/WR-Next_phase_for_French_geological_disposal-0501127.html

January 5, 2012

NM, lab reach deal on radioactive waste cleanup, *Bloomberg Businessweek*
State environmental officials have reached an agreement with Los Alamos National Laboratory to expedite the cleanup of thousands of barrels of radioactive waste. Environment Department Secretary [David] Martin told a special meeting of the lab's Citizens Advisory Board that it has agreed to have all the barrels currently stored above ground removed by June 30, 2014. Any newly generated waste will have to be removed by the end of 2014. The toxic waste made national headlines this summer when a massive wildfire raged near the premier nuclear facility for more than a week, at one point lapping at the edges of lab property.

<http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9S33E301.htm>

January 5, 2012

First shipments of U-233 to Nevada, *Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog*

The Dept. of Energy's Oak Ridge office today announced that the first shipment of U-233 to Nevada had been completed, signaling the start of a years-long effort to empty the fissile material stored at a World War II-era facility at ORNL. According to DOE, the six canisters contained small Zero Power Reactor plates that will be used in future tests at the National Criticality Experiments Research Center at the Nevada National Security Site. The experiments center is located within the high-security Device Assembly Facility. All told, 128 of the Zero Power Reactor canisters will be shipped to Nevada, DOE said. The first containers reportedly included small amounts of U-233 in an oxide form. DOE said the shipment was executed safely and ahead of schedule by Isotek Systems -- the government's contractor on the project. The transfer of canisters to Nevada is expected to take six to nine months, DOE said.

<http://blogs.knoxnews.com/munger/2012/01/first-shipments-of-u-233-to-ne.html>

January 3, 2012

Spain selects site for waste storage, *World Nuclear News*

Villar de Cañas has won the right to host a storage facility for Spain's used nuclear fuel and help fill a gap in the country's nuclear power framework. The region will benefit from the creation of up to 500 construction jobs and then skilled work for around 60 years. The small town in central Cuenca province was among 14 localities that declared individual interest at the end of 2009 in having the storage facility. Eight of these applications were formally accepted and, although all were declared technically suitable, it was Villar de Cañas that was officially selected on 30 December 2011. The interministerial commission responsible considered Villar de Cañas to have 'very good' credentials in terms of geology, seismology, meteorology, hydrology, site geometry and risk in relation to local population centres.

http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/WR_Spain_selects_site_for_waste_storage_0301121.html