

NGA FEDERAL FACILITIES TASK FORCE  
SPRING MEETING WITH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
JUNE 10-11, 2008  
EXECUTIVE MEETING SUMMARY

On June 10-11, 2008, the National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices hosted a meeting of the NGA Federal Facilities Task Force (FFTF) and U.S. Department of Energy Office of Environmental Management (DOE-EM) officials in Richland, Washington. The overarching aims of the meeting were to improve intergovernmental communications and allow for an open dialogue on how states and DOE-EM can work toward their common goals during a period of diminished resources.

The meeting sessions on June 10 provided a forum for dialogue between FFTF members and U.S. DOE representatives on their respective concerns and priorities, as well as recent developments at DOE headquarters. On June 11, meeting participants toured the Hanford Site. The tour included a general overview of facilities as well as in-depth information on waste treatment plant and groundwater remediation projects.

Meeting presentations and materials are available at:  
<http://www.fftfcleanupnews.org/archives.htm>

**EM and Communications - Jeffrey Bobeck, Director, Office of Communications and External Affairs, DOE-EM**

Mr. Bobeck's presentation is available on-line.

Mr. Bobeck provided the Task Force with an overview of the newly created Office of Communications and External Affairs (OCEA). OCEA's mission is to strengthen EM's communications function through public accountability, stakeholder outreach, and utilization of a "corporate communications" model. OCEA faces several challenges, including the technical complexity of cleanup, the traditional culture of secrecy around the weapons complex, nuclear "cleanup fatigue", the transition from reactive to proactive messaging, and the lack of existing message infrastructure within EM.

Mr. Bobeck pointed out that of the 1400 employees within EM, only four are political appointees (Assistant Secretary, Director of Communications and External Affairs, Senior Communications Advisor, and Senior Policy Advisory). Some key advantages for political appointees are the ability to advocate for programs at the highest levels of DOE as well as provide a litmus test for program clarity (i.e. if a political appointee is able to understand EM's processes, it is more likely that the public and Congress will also be able to understand them). DOE is in the process of filling the career positions of Communications Support Specialist and Policy/Project Analyst to mirror the politically appointed communications and policy positions.

OCEA is not a direct spokesman for DOE, it works through other DOE offices to communicate with the media, Congress, public advisory groups and EM sites. EM's communications goals, as embodied by OCEA, are to apply best corporate practices, brand EM's core messages, strengthen basic communications tools, build new constituencies, and institutionalize communications procedures.

Mr. Bobeck made the following additional points in response to questions from Task Force members:

- EM's role is not to advocate the use of nuclear power, however it is important for EM to communicate its experience with nuclear power and lessons learned over the last twenty years.
- OCEA understands the tension between focusing on success and concentrating on remaining work. It is important to communicate the message that at the outset cleanup yielded early results while recognizing that current and future work is incrementally more difficult.
- With respect to the issue of compliant budgets, when specific milestones are at risk, it is important to communicate the specific reasons, such as technical complexity. The agreements between DOE and states are living agreements that must be constantly redone, and moving forward this is an important reason to build support and public understanding for the EM program.
- With regard to a question about regulator's inability to review DOE-EM's "full compliance budget," Mr. Bobeck emphasized the need for ongoing dialogue between DOE and regulators that creates support for what needs to be done. Doug Frost from DOE-EM added that the embargoed nature of the President's budget makes it impossible to share the full compliance budget. Moreover, Merle Sykes is working hard to provide opportunities for input to the budget, and DOE finds it very valuable to understand what the customer's priorities are. Mr. Frost said that in the final analysis, it will not be important to see the full compliance budget.
- One of OCEA's challenges is to change the impression that EM is operating a site-by-site program. One way to change this view is to provide support to DOE's site offices and give them access to resources at DOE headquarters.

**Current Cleanup Activities at Hanford - Jane Hedges, Program Manager, Nuclear Waste Program, Washington State Department of Ecology**

Ms. Hedges's presentation is available [on-line](#).

Jane Hedges presented an overview of current cleanup activities at the Hanford Site. Hanford's current waste inventory includes 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel, 18 tons of plutonium, and 1,936 cesium and strontium capsules. Of great significance are 50 million gallons of waste stored in 177 underground tanks.

The protection of the Columbia River is the most important reason for the cleanup of the Hanford Site. Radionuclide and chemical contaminant plumes in and around the groundwater on the Hanford Site threaten the river's health, and various site cleanup projects aim to remediate this contamination. Notable achievements at the Hanford Site include closing the "Wyden Watch List" (tank safety issues), moving spent fuel away from the Columbia River, removing pumpable liquids from single-shell tanks, and emptying the waste from seven single-shell tanks. Remaining challenges include cleanup of the central plateau and the transfer of transuranic waste to WIPP. The completion and operation of the Waste Treatment Facility to remediate the waste stored in underground tanks is a critical component of the Hanford Site's cleanup plan. The Waste Treatment Plant, currently under construction, is the fifth and latest iteration of the underground tank cleanup plan; the first plan was developed in 1989.

**DOE Budget - Inès Triay, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, DOE-EM (via phone)**

Dr. Triay's presentation is available [on-line](#).

Dr. Triay provided the Task Force with an overview of significant ongoing activities within DOE-EM. DOE-EM accomplishments include consolidating materials at Savannah River (SRS) and dealing with tank waste at the Idaho National Lab (INL). Dr. Triay thanked the Task Force for its

assistance with the TRU waste issue and noted that EM is currently sending five shipments of remote-handled TRU waste per week. EM has spent significant time and focused energy on groundwater issues throughout the complex, including groundwater remediation efforts in the Columbia River corridor and in Idaho.

EM is currently in the midst of strategic planning to examine the “return on investment” that can be gained by increased investment in certain areas such as TRU, low level waste (LLW), groundwater & soil cleanup, and D&D. For example, if there is a larger investment that can be made on TRU waste without losing momentum in top priority areas (i.e., tank waste, nuclear materials, spent nuclear fuel), that strategy may be worth pursuing.

EM is also considering transition materials for the next presidential administration. These materials are divided into accomplishments, future items/activities, and excess facilities that are slated to come from other Program Secretarial Offices (PSOs). It is EM’s hope to make a clear delineation between its current portfolio and potential additions. Finally, EM is considering the strategic direction to pursue to justify an increased investment in the EM program.

Dr. Triay made the following additional points in response to questions from Task Force members:

- Recent court judgments against DOE (i.e., \$10 million at Oak Ridge and \$900 million at Rocky Flats) may have to be paid from programmatic funds. DOE is evaluating its options. DOE may need to go to Congress to get an appropriation.
- In the end, EM has to adequately justify whatever it is requesting, be it D&D of gaseous diffusion plants or other large projects.
- Because of the transition to a new administration, EM is not developing a five year budget plan for this year. Assistant Secretary Rispoli is interested in talking with stakeholders, regulators, and community leaders about a baseline, and it is EM’s goal to have the transition materials reflect this interest. The goal is for the transition materials to be underway by the end of summer or in early fall.

**Update on Compliance, Milestones, and Waste Management - Frank Marcinowski, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Regulatory Compliance, DOE-EM**

Mr. Marcinowski’s presentation is available [on-line](#).

Mr. Marcinowski presented an overview of DOE’s waste disposition activities. Over the past several years, disposal decision-making has shifted away from the sites to a more complex-wide approach. DOE has developed tools such as the Waste Inventory Management System (WIMS) to track waste, help make decisions, and aid in the disposition of orphan waste streams. There are errors such as the recent drum of errant waste that was sent to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP), but overall the system functions well. This is evident in that the errant drum that was shipped to WIPP was eventually identified and retrieved. Major facility construction is continuing, such as the Waste Treatment Plant at Hanford, the integrated waste treatment unit at INL (Idaho National Labs) (for sodium-bearing waste), and the saltstone facility at SRS (Savannah River Site).

In February DOE issued a record of decision (ROD) for transporting transuranic waste (TRU) from small quantity generator sites to INL. In June DOE met at the Nevada site office and conducted a planning exercise to look at a dozen small sites plus Hanford to develop a schedule for moving waste through INL. The schedule will be further developed by August.

The draft environmental impact statement for disposal of greater-than-class-C (GTCC) waste is scheduled for mid-2009, with the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) expected

approximately one year later. Analysis of the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) has identified the potential for significant volumes of GTCC waste (up to 600,000 cubic meters) to be generated by its projects. Mr. Marcinowski also noted that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is re-evaluating whether depleted uranium hexafluoride (DUF6) is suitable for shallow land burial. It will have a big impact if NRC determines it is not suitable for such disposition.

Mr. Marcinowski made the following additional points in response to questions from Task Force members:

- Corporate boards do not have outside observers because they are for internal planning. DOE discussed opening the meetings to outside observers and decided it would be possible for observers to attend certain parts of corporate board meetings but not the entire meetings.
- The one year delay on the sodium waste bearing facility is based on the current budget and is not contingent on supplemental funds.
- With respect to the letter from environmental groups requesting DOE to rewrite the ROD for TRU waste: DOE believes it has a strong rebuttal to the groups' request and will be sending it out next week.
- The certification program for any TRU waste at Hanford may be put on hold for now, and in the interim, all TRU waste will be shipped to INL. Currently Hanford is the most expensive TRU waste handling operation, so the INL option will continue until DOE can find a path toward a more efficient operation of Hanford's facilities.
- In response to a question, Mr. Marcinowski said he would check in to whether the Nevada portion of the TRU waste route to INL has been prepared for this type of transportation.
- DOE plans to close the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) Incinerator, located at East Tennessee Technology Park (ETTP) in Oak Ridge, TN, in 2010 assuming there are commercial alternatives for waste disposition (these alternatives are currently unclear). TSCA will operate through 2009 on a modified burn plan with decreased volumes. DOE will also analyze the waste destined for TSCA for potential commercial disposal.
- DOE is potentially interested in using Waste Control Specialist's facility in Texas for disposal of low-level waste. Given the lack of LLW disposal facilities, DOE will likely take steps to enter into an agreement with WCS for LLW disposal.
- DOE has lists of excess facilities from other PSOs, many of which still contain waste. EM is currently evaluating these lists to gain a better sense of the resources required to deal with the facilities, but EM is not agreeing to take responsibility for any of the facilities until adequate resources are made available. Barring a sudden upswing in funding, this may take many years. None of the waste from these facilities is included in the WIMS system.

#### **A History of Hanford - Michele Gerber, Hanford Site Historian, Fluor Hanford Company**

Dr. Gerber's presentation is available [on-line](#).

Dr. Gerber gave a presentation on the history of the Hanford Site from its inception in the early 1940's through the present day. Dr. Gerber's presentation touched on the site's selection, the development and demographics of the work force, the rapid construction of the site's facilities, and the secrecy surrounding the site's primary purpose. The presentation described the post-World War II phase of the Hanford Site and its role throughout the Cold War as a plutonium production and nuclear research center. Dr. Gerber concluded her presentation with a discussion of developments at the Hanford Site in the post-Cold War era, including the implementation of cleanup operations, which continue to the present day.