

News from Around the Complex

December 2007

December 31, 2007

Cleanup at site progresses: Work at landfill with radioactive refuse ahead of schedule, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

Except for the daily convoy of trucks bearing "radioactive" placards, there are few signs of the government's post-Cold War penance taking place in South Knoxville. The trucks, however, tell part of the story. Since 2004, more than 10,000 truckloads of radioactive scrap, dirt and debris have been hauled from cleanup sites in the Vestal community to the Department of Energy's massive landfill in Oak Ridge. The nuclear crud is, in essence, returning home. During the 1950s and '60s - and even into the early 1980s - federal contractors in Oak Ridge sold scrap to licensed vendors and allowed them to haul away tons of radioactive junk. Much of that Oak Ridge stuff ended up at the now-notorious David Witherspoon operations along Maryville Pike, and the saga that ensued has been documented over the past 20 years.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/dec/31/cleanup-at-site-progresses/>

December 31, 2007

FFTF fuel being sent to Idaho for possible recycling, *Tri-City Herald*

Hanford has begun to ship sodium-bonded fuel from its Fast Flux Test Facility to Idaho to have the uranium extracted for possible reuse by commercial nuclear power plants. It's the most recent step in deactivating the research reactor to allow it to be put into a long-term surveillance and maintenance mode at minimum cost. The federal government has so far found no use for the reactor that top officials consider cost effective, although FFTF supporters recently have proposed it be used for research for reprocessing fuel as part of the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9547650p-9459964c.html>

December 28, 2007

Study says water clean near facility, *Augusta Chronicle*

BARNWELL, S.C. - A new federal study says Savannah River Site isn't contaminating nearby water supplies -- at least not enough to make anyone sick. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry reported no significant signs of contamination at SRS nor imminent health risks to groundwater sites nearby, noting that though "site-related contaminants were detected in off-site surface water, they posed no health concern." The report, dated Dec. 17, is a final assessment by the agency -- part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services -- on SRS's 310-acre area.

http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/122807/met_178313.shtml

December 27, 2007

DOE, NMED continue discussions regarding fines, *Carlsbad Current-Argus*

CARLSBAD - The Department of Energy's Carlsbad Field Office has basically agreed to one fine proposed by the New Mexico Environment Department, but the federal and state agencies are still in ongoing discussion over two other proposed fines. In November, the NMED announced that fines totaling nearly \$1 million were being levied against the DOE Carlsbad Field Office for alleged violations of its permit at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant 27 miles east of Carlsbad.

http://www.currentargus.com/ci_7824678

December 26, 2007

Questions Over Waste Remain, Knoxville News-Sentinel

OAK RIDGE - In October 2005, cleanup workers made an astonishing discovery at a Cold War scrap yard west of the K-25 uranium-enrichment plant. Three rusty casks containing thousands of curies of radioactive cesium-137 were found amid the mountainous piles of metal scrap. Nobody knew where they came from. The old casks were unmarked, and the highly radioactive material did not fit the profile of other junk that came to the site in the 1950s and '60s. There were plenty of questions and - more than two years later - they remain unanswered. If anything, officials are more tight-lipped than ever about the nuclear find. Everything seems to be a secret, including the whereabouts of the casks.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/dec/26/questions-over-waste-remain/>

December 22, 2007

Hanford waste treatment goal met, Tri-City Herald

Hanford workers have finished treating enough low-level radioactive waste mixed with hazardous chemicals to fill 31,346 drums. The work was completed Thursday in time for the Department of Energy and its contractor, Fluor Hanford, to meet a legally binding Tri-Party Agreement requirement for treating that quantity of waste by the end of the year. About half of the waste has been in storage awaiting treatment.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9533389p-9444281c.html>

December 21, 2007

Y-12 uranium storage project reaches milestone, The Oak Ridger

Installation of the roof of the new uranium storage facility at the Y-12 Nation Security Complex is now complete. The final concrete pour to complete the roof took place Wednesday. Completion of the roof means that the main body of the structure — the storage area — is now enclosed and installation of mechanical and electrical equipment can proceed during the coming winter months without delays caused by inclement weather. Construction of the new uranium storehouse, known as the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility, is now 70 percent complete. The overall schedule for construction completion is August 2008.

http://www.oakridger.com/stories/122107/new_227507380.shtml

December 21, 2007

Audit recommends Hanford landfill continues unused, Tri-City Herald

The Department of Energy could save \$13 million by postponing disposal of radioactive waste at Hanford's Integrated Disposal Facility from 2010 to 2017, according to a report by DOE's Office of the Inspector General. However, DOE said it was not sure it would have enough other space to dispose of low-level radioactive waste until 2017, particularly with uncertainties about what waste might be sent to the Hanford nuclear reservation from other sites in the nation. Construction of the first two disposal cells at the Integrated Disposal Facility was completed in 2006 at a cost of \$23 million. It was built to dispose of low-activity radioactive waste turned into a stable glass form at Hanford's vitrification plant or at a pilot plant planned to test bulk vitrification. In addition, the audit, released Thursday, said that it would be used for other waste generated at Hanford or shipped to Hanford for disposal. It has yet to be used.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9531560p-9442434c.html>

December 19, 2007

Study calls for more DOE employees, Tri-City Herald

The Department of Energy needs more staff to manage cleanup of Hanford and other nuclear sites, according to a study ordered by Congress in 2005. The study, released Tuesday, also recommended working toward combining DOE's two Hanford management offices and detailed the frustration of local Hanford officials over frequent requests for information or action from DOE headquarters in Washington, D.C. "One official noted that sometimes the number of calls he received, even on relatively minor issues, were so numerous that they prevented him from taking timely action to resolve the problems," said the report prepared by the National Academy of Public Administration.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9527820p-9438629c.html>

December 18, 2007

Statement from DOE Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management James Rispoli on the National Academy of Public Administration's Management Review of DOE's Office of Environmental Management, DOE Press Release

"Today the National Academy of Public Administration released their comprehensive management review of the Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management (EM). EM is a \$5.6 billion per year program responsible for the risk reduction and cleanup of the environmental legacy of the Nation's nuclear weapons program, one of the largest, most diverse, and technically complex environmental programs in the world."

<http://energy.gov/news/5782.htm>

December 18, 2007

YUCCA MOUNTAIN: Congress cuts 22 percent from project: Foes celebrate latest whacking, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON -- Congress is taking another deep bite out of Yucca Mountain spending in a final budget bill it plans to pass this week, raising the possibility of even more delays in the government's bid for a nuclear waste site in Nevada. Energy Department officials could not immediately detail the possible effects to the planned national repository from a 22 percent cut in the bill that was made public on Monday. The project's director, Ward Sproat, said last week that deep cuts could cause DOE to rethink its once inviolate goal of filing a repository license application by the end of next June, which would be a big step forward for the often troubled effort. Although President Bush budgeted Yucca for \$494.5 million in fiscal 2008, lawmakers allocated no more than \$386.5 million in a year-end wrap-up bill that would keep the government funded through next September, according to the office of Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev.

<http://www.lvrj.com/news/12586951.html>

December 18, 2007

NNSA Releases Draft Plan To Transform Nuclear Weapons Complex, NNSA Press Release

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Saying that the nation's aging Cold War-era nuclear weapons complex is too big and too costly, the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) top official announced its proposal to create a nuclear weapons infrastructure that is smaller, safer, more secure and more cost effective. NNSA Administrator Thomas P. D'Agostino said that as the numbers of U.S. nuclear weapons continue to decline consistent with the nation's evolving nuclear deterrence strategy, and with flat or declining budgets in store for the maintenance and upkeep of the remaining warheads, the infrastructure to support this mission must be consolidated, made

more efficient, and updated in a few key areas in order to meet the needs of the future.

http://www.nnsa.doe.gov/docs/newsreleases/2007/PR_2007-12-18_NA-07-64.htm
Report available at <http://www.nnsa.doe.gov/complextransformation.htm>

December 17, 2007

Congress' spending bill would offer nuclear plant loan guarantees, *Platts Information Services*

Washington – A fiscal 2008 catch-all spending bill Congress made public late Sunday would offer loan guarantees for new nuclear power plants, but cut funding for US Department of Energy programs to help deal with spent nuclear fuel. The Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, an experimental DOE program that seeks to reprocess nuclear spent fuel by burning it in commercial power reactors, would receive less than half the \$395 million the president requested for fiscal 2008. Nuclear energy proponent Senator Pete Domenici of New Mexico, who serves as ranking Republican on the subcommittee that drafted the energy and water development section of the omnibus spending measure, applauded the \$179-million allotment.

<http://www.platts.com/Nuclear/News/6664234.xml?p=Nuclear/News&sub=Nuclear?src=energybulletin>

December 17th, 2007

DOE study compares 4 treatment methods, *Tri-City Herald*

Adding radioactive waste treatment capabilities beyond those planned at Hanford's vitrification plant would save money, get leak-prone waste tanks emptied sooner and speed treatment, according to a draft of a new Department of Energy study. "The report definitely told us they need that second facility," said Suzanne Dahl, tank waste disposal project manager for the Washington State Department of Ecology, the regulatory agency for the project. Hanford DOE officials already were preparing a business case evaluation for top DOE officials in Washington, D.C., on how to treat low-activity radioactive waste when a Government Accountability Office report in June raised questions about treatment.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9524882p-9435655c.html>

December 16, 2007

Ohio, Michigan running out of ways to store their radioactive waste, *Toledo Blade*

Michigan and Ohio are among 36 states that will have a greater buildup of radioactive waste after July 1 if a South Carolina landfill follows through with its plans to start turning them away. But the two neighboring states won't likely exchange words as harsh as they did in the early 1990s, when both took turns scouring their landscapes for a possible site to bury tons of low-level radioactive waste from several Midwestern states. "Like almost everyone else, we're hoping that Barnwell doesn't actually close next summer. But by all indications, it will," Thor Strong, chief of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's radiological protection section, said. He was referring to the low-level radioactive waste dump near Barnwell, S.C., one of only three in the country and one that almost all states outside of the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain regions have relied upon for 36 years.

<http://toledoblade.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071216/NEWS06/712160329>

December 14, 2007

Thanks a £10m!, *News and Star (UK)*

SCHOOLS, leisure facilities and health services in west Cumbria are set for a huge cash injection as part of a £10m thank you for hosting the UK's national nuclear waste dump. In a groundbreaking – and long awaited – funding package Copeland will receive a £10m lump sum and £1.5m a year for accepting the low level waste depository near Drigg. Councillors and union leaders have long campaigned for the area to be recompensed with cash, as well as jobs, for hosting the site. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) was attacked earlier this year for failing to come up with a promised package. The Government was warned west Cumbrians would not put up with the dump, and an anticipated increase in the amount of waste stored there, if money was not offered in exchange. A pressure group made up of local politicians and union chiefs was set up to take on the government over the issue.
<http://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/viewarticle.aspx?id=575133>

December 13, 2007

Two Independent Assessments Find the Department of Energy's Yucca Mountain Project is on Track, DOE Press Release

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Director of the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) today released two independent assessments addressing areas critical to the overall success of the Yucca Mountain repository program. These assessments, which include an independent review of the OCRWM Quality Assurance (QA) Program and an independent review of its engineering processes and procedures, have concluded that the Yucca Mountain Project's current QA and engineering processes and procedures are consistent with standard nuclear industry practices.
<http://energy.gov/news/5776.htm>

December 12, 2007

Tritium container found: Officials at SRS stumped by item's trip to landfill, Augusta Chronicle

Savannah River Site officials are unsure how an empty container normally used to ship radioactive tritium ended up in a scrap metal recycler's landfill near Columbia. The 3-foot-tall H1616 shipping container was discovered in November when Mid-Carolina Steel & Recycling notified authorities of its presence. "It wasn't contaminated, it didn't have anything in it and it turned out that it was damaged," said Will Callicott, the spokesman for Washington Savannah River Co., which manages the nuclear site. The containers, which transport the gas used to boost the explosive power of nuclear weapons, are carefully inventoried when they have something in them, he said, but they are not as heavily monitored when empty. Although the recycler routinely participates in the site's scrap metal program, no one has determined how the empty container was included in the material sent to Columbia.
http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/121207/met_176353.shtml.

December 12, 2007

DOE incinerator down as waste concerns go up, Knoxville News-Sentinel

An annual inspection has revealed some unexpected damage to the government's toxic-waste incinerator, which may delay the Oak Ridge facility's planned restart in early January. The 20-year-old incinerator was shut down Oct. 14 for its traditional fall outage, when general maintenance and repairs are conducted. According to Bechtel Jacobs, the Department of Energy's environmental cleanup manager in Oak Ridge, inspectors discovered damage in the steel beams that provide structural support on the outside of the incinerator's secondary combustion roof. "It has not been determined how long repairs will take, but the incinerator will not resume

operations until they are completed," Bechtel Jacobs spokesman Dennis Hill said. Hill said the extent of damage and the repairs are still being evaluated. There is no cost estimate at this point or timetable for return to operations, he said.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/dec/12/doe-incinerator-down-as-waste-concerns-go-up/>

December 12, 2007

Army Corps to remove radioactive soil from nuclear site, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

Five years after its initial assessment of a former nuclear waste dump in Armstrong County, the Army Corps of Engineers has decided to pursue a \$53 million plan to excavate and remove soil from the 40-acre site along the Kiskiminetas River. Based on the decision announced by the corps yesterday, a contractor will dig out an estimated 40,000 cubic yards of radioactive waste material and soil from the property known as the "Shallow Land Disposal Area." It is a former disposal site for the Nuclear Materials and Equipment Co., or NUMEC, in Parks, 32 miles northeast of Pittsburgh. The soil will be taken to a radioactive dump site in Clive, Utah. Removal of the contaminated waste and soil was one of five alternatives considered, and according to the corps, "the most protective in the long term" of human health and the environment. NUMEC, which began making nuclear fuel at its facility in nearby Apollo in 1957 and processed up to 450 metric tons a year, legally dumped an estimated 23,500 cubic yards of waste slag, sludge and solvents contaminated with radioactive uranium and thorium at the site from 1961 to 1970.

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07346/840938-54.stm>

December 11, 2007

Hanford workers beat deadline for waste retrieval, *Tri-City Herald*

Hanford workers have met the Department of Energy's legal deadline for retrieving temporarily buried radioactive waste for the fourth year in a row. This year they beat the Tri-Party Agreement deadline, which gave them until the end of 2007 to have enough radioactive waste removed to fill 34,600 drums. The waste was temporarily buried in drums and oversized boxes at the Hanford nuclear reservation until the nation had a permanent repository open in New Mexico for waste contaminated with plutonium. The work gets tougher each year. "The project's worked really hard in the last year to work with some of the hurdles of degraded containers," said Mark French, the Department of Energy federal project director for waste treatment and disposal. "It's been a real challenge to meet this milestone." Waste potentially contaminated with plutonium was temporarily buried at Hanford in the '70s and '80s until the nation opened a permanent repository for transuranic waste in New Mexico. At Hanford, transuranic waste typically is laboratory equipment, clothing and other trash contaminated with plutonium.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9511993p-9422775c.html>

December 11, 2007

Department of Energy Welcomes the Republic of Korea to the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, *DOE Press Release*

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) today welcomed the Republic of Korea's decision to join the President's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) and sign the GNEP Statement of Principles. GNEP, a voluntary partnership, aims to safely and securely expand nuclear power worldwide while responsibly managing nuclear waste and reducing proliferation risks. Korea's announcement brings the total number of GNEP partners to 19.

<http://www.energy.gov/news/5764.htm>

December 10, 2007

Loss of radioactive dump sparks security concerns: 36 states will have to store waste elsewhere, *USA Today*

Nuclear power plants, hospitals, universities and research facilities in 36 states will have to find new places for disposing of radioactive materials beginning July 1 when a waste site near Barnwell, S.C., closes the door to them. The site has been the only place available for most of the nation to send the two most contaminated categories of low-level nuclear waste, including filters that clean reactor water. Closing Barnwell to the 36 states is raising concerns about the security risks resulting from multiple waste sites. "The goal of radioactive waste management should be to isolate the material, and this does the exact opposite, which is to disperse it," said Diane D'Arrigo of the nuclear watchdog group, the Nuclear Information and Resource Service. "It's a horrible idea." State lawmakers have repeatedly debated whether to shut down or at least limit the number of states that can use the Barnwell facility, which is a landfill owned by the state and operated by a private company, EnergySolutions.

http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20071210/a_nukedump10.art.htm

December 10, 2007

Engineer says ground water cleanup test at Hanford 'promising', *Tri-City Herald*

Phosphate injected into the ground water of the Hanford nuclear reservation just north of Richland this summer dramatically lowered the amount of uranium contaminating the water. Now the Department of Energy needs to make that change permanent. Three months after the injection, uranium contamination had bounced back up to about three times the level allowed in drinking water. "We didn't find the silver bullet for uranium we were hoping for," said Alicia Boyd, environmental engineer for the Environmental Protection Agency, a Hanford regulator. "But the technology is very promising. It might be successful with adjustments." The proposed technology required a two-step chemical injection, with the first step working as well as laboratory tests had predicted. It was the second step, planned to make sure the drop in uranium levels lasted, that will require adjustments.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9510764p-9421508c.html>

December 7, 2007

Utah governor welcomes foreign nuke waste, *United Press International*

SALT LAKE CITY - Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. said low-level nuclear waste from foreign countries can be disposed of in his state, as long as it meets regulations. EnergySolutions has applied to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to import 20,000 tons of radioactive waste from Italy that would be processed in Tennessee and disposed of in a landfill in Utah's Tooele County, about 80 miles west of Salt Lake City, The Salt Lake Tribune said Thursday. Huntsman spokeswoman Lisa Roskelly said the governor is concerned any waste coming into the state meets current laws and regulations, U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon, D-Tenn., said he wants the NRC to reject the application unless EnergySolutions can prove the foreign shipments will be safe and not cause a shortage of space for U.S. low-level nuclear waste.

http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Top_News/2007/12/07/utah_governor_welcomes_foreign_nuke_waste/6094/

December 5, 2007

Foreign waste may come to OR, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE - If the Nuclear Regulatory Commission approves the import license, radioactive waste from Italy could begin arriving here next spring for processing at EnergySolutions' facility on Bear Creek Road. EnergySolutions wants to import about 20,000 tons of waste from Italy over a five-year period. All the radioactive waste would be processed at Oak Ridge, but EnergySolutions officials said Tuesday that none of the material would be left at the Bear Creek facility or disposed of in Tennessee. Recycled products would be shipped elsewhere for reuse and any residues left from incineration or other treatments would be shipped to the company's landfill at Clive, Utah, the officials said.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/dec/05/foreign-waste-may-come-to-or/>

December 5, 2007

Pantex planning storage upgrade, *Amarillo Globe-News*

The Pantex Plant is eyeing a project to replace Zone 4, a heavily guarded underground bunkers complex where much of the nation's weapons-grade plutonium is stored. B & W Pantex, the plant contractor, said the replacement project is in the planning stage but construction, if authorized, would be completed by 2018. B & W Pantex said it does not have a preliminary cost estimate, but replacing Zone 4 would likely cost millions of dollars. "We can't pre-suppose the final design of the new facility. During line item development, the most cost-efficient design (through operations) will be determined - one that meets all safety and security requirements," B & W Pantex said. Zone 4 is a series of hardened concrete magazines where plutonium pits, the cores of nuclear warheads, and nuclear weapons are stored.

http://www.amarillo.com/stories/120507/new_9121223.shtml

December 5, 2007

State fines DOE \$500,000 over spill at Hanford, *Tri-City Herald*

The state of Washington has fined the Department of Energy \$500,000 for a spill this summer of about 85 gallons of high level radioactive waste. "It was entirely preventable," said Eric Van Mason, an inspector for the state Department of Ecology. The state also is concerned that a series of poor decisions after the spill put workers "in grave danger" from exposure to the waste and vapors, said Jane Hedges, manager of the Department of Ecology's Nuclear Waste Program. Work to empty waste from leak-prone older tanks is substantially behind schedule and the spill could add six months to delays, she said. CH2M Hill Hanford Group, the contractor on the project, has stopped retrieving waste from the underground tanks until it is sure problems have been resolved. The waste spilled July 27 as workers were pumping radioactive waste from Tank S-102, built in the 1940s.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9499076p-9410055c.html>

December 4, 2007

Idaho nuke research lab operator must pay \$123,750 fine, *Salt Lake Tribune*

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho - The company that runs the Idaho National Laboratory must pay a \$123,750 fine for violating federal nuclear safety requirements. The Battelle Energy Alliance's violations occurred around Aug. 20, 2006. The company, which has a \$4.8 billion contract to run the research laboratory for a decade, failed to follow reactor operating instructions, didn't correct problems and neglected to perform adequate management assessments - all related to restarting the Neutron Radiography reactor. The reactor was subsequently shut down, something that wasn't planned. While reactor safety systems weren't compromised, United States Department of Energy officials say they expect more professionalism from their operators than Battelle exhibited.

http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_7633197